



THE JESSE JAMES STORIES

ORIGINAL NARRATIVES OF THE JAMES BOYS

Issued Weekly. By Subscription \$2.50 per year. Entered as Second Class Matter at New York Post Office by STREET & SMITH, 238 William St., N. Y.

No. 4.

Price, Five Cents.



OUT CAME JESSE JAMES' REVOLVER. CRACK! THE BLACKSMITH'S HELPER FELL DEAD IN FRONT OF HIS EMPLOYER.



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No. 4.

NEW YORK, June 1, 1901.

Price Five Cents.

JESSE JAMES' BLACK AGENTS;

OR,

The Wild Raid at Bullion City.

By W. B. LAWSON.

CHAPTER I.

A TERRIBLE EXPERIENCE.

"I know this yer horse. Whar'd you git him, stranger?"

"Bought him."

"Lately?"

"A month ago. But what are my affairs to you? Whirl in and shoe the nag and quit chinning about it."

It was in Southern Missouri at a little cross-roads village.

Three horsemen had halted in front of a blacksmith-shop, and one of them, mounted on a coal-black gelding, had requested the blacksmith to put shoes on the hind feet.

The knight of the forge and bellows had uttered the words with which this chapter opens after he had bestowed a keen glance at the gelding.

The horseman was preparing to dismount, when the blacksmith's helper came out of the shop with a heavy poker in his hand.

He had overheard the conversation in relation to the horse, and had come to a quick conclusion.

"You bought the gelding, did you?" he said, with a sneer, to the man who claimed ownership.

"Yes."

"You lie! Ther gelding was stolen from Kunnel Hopkins night afore last."

Out came the horseman's revolver.

Crack!

The blacksmith's helper fell dead in front of his employer

"If you want a taste of the same pie, say so," hissed the murderer, as he turned on the terrified blacksmith.

"No, no"—holding up his hands—"I—I've got nuthin' ter say."

"All right, then."

The horseman remounted the gelding, and rode off with his two companions.

Fifteen minutes later the blacksmith was on his way to the constable's office in the village.

A hundred yards from the shop, he met the sheriff and a young man with a handsome and resolute countenance.

They were on horseback, and their animals looked as if they had been ridden furiously.

"Just the man we were looking for," said the sheriff, as he reined in his horse. "We're after the James boys. Have you seen them?"

"I wouldn't know 'em if I did see 'em."

"Jesse James is a stout, broad-shouldered fellow, with reddish hair and beard and cold, blue eyes."

"That's the one," cried the blacksmith, excitedly.

"That's the fiend who killed my helper."

"Killed your helper—when?"

"Not half an hour ago."

"This is news indeed, Lane," said the sheriff to his companion. Then to the blacksmith: "How did it happen?"

He was quickly informed.

"Frank and Jesse James and Hank Pray," was the prompt comment of Sam Lane, who was a Western detective of high reputation.

After ascertaining the direction taken by the three outlaws, the sheriff and the detective rode on.

They were just passing the blacksmith-shop when the owner of the place rejoined them.

"I'm goin' with you," he said, grimly. "I rather think I'll have a finger in this yer pie myself."

"Glad to have your assistance," returned the sheriff.

"We'll take him, dead or alive," said the blacksmith.

"Who? Jesse James?"

"Yes."

"And the others, also, of course."

"Ter blazes with the others. Jesse James is my meat." The blacksmith's face glowed with savage ferocity.

The sheriff smiled.

"You can take Jesse," he replied, "and we'll attend to Frank and Hank Pray."

"That suits me to a T."

The road the outlaws had followed led to a tract of low meadow land.

The pursuers had reached the brow of a small hill, which descended into a hollow, when they met a boy driving a small bunch of cattle.

In response to a number of questions put by the sheriff, he said that three men, answering the description of the outlaws, had passed him fifteen minutes before.

"One o' ther nags was lame," he said, "an' I heerd ther feller that was a-ridin' it say as how they'd have ter pull up soon, an' give him a chance ter git another."

"I know where we'll find 'em," remarked the sheriff, as they left the boy, "and that's down at Kerry's old house."

"How far away is it?" asked Sam Lane.

"About a mile."

Ten minutes' riding brought them in sight of the structure.

It was in the center of what was once a field, but the fences were gone, and the place was grown up with scrubby oaks, sassafrass, and briers.

The house had two doors opening on the porch.

The sheriff's party remained concealed in a grove of trees waiting until some one should open one of the doors and come out.

It was close on dusk when Jesse James stepped out on the porch.

The moment the blacksmith saw him, he sprang into the open, and, leveling a rifle at the outlaw, pulled the trigger.

With a yell of triumph the blacksmith ran toward his victim.

The sheriff and the detective followed him with rifles cocked.

The blacksmith had not acted according to the arranged programme, but having opened the ball, they determined to see him through.

A surprise awaited the three man-hunters when they were within a few yards of the porch.

Jesse James sprang to his feet, and at the same moment Frank James and Hank Pray appeared in the doorway.

The latter was a Hercules in size and strength.

The outlaws were armed only with pistols, and they fired simultaneously.

Down went the sheriff, shot through the heart.

The detective was close behind him, and, as the brave officer fell, he threw up his hands convulsively, and clutched at Lane's person with the effect of distracting the latter's aim.

The blacksmith in the meantime was playing possum.

When the outlaws raised their pistols, he dropped to the ground and flattened himself on his face.

Sam Lane was trying to disengage himself from the dying grasp of the sheriff, when Jesse James exclaimed:

"Now for it."

Upon the words, he made a dash forward, followed by Frank James and Hank Pray.

The James boys had reached Sam Lane when the blacksmith jumped to his feet directly in front of Hank Pray.

He was so close to the bandit that he could not use his rifle effectively.

Dropping it he struck Pray a powerful blow in the face, before the latter could use his pistol, and then dashed around the house.

Pray quickly recovered his wits, and started after his foe.

Then began a chase around the house, which was about twenty feet square.

After going around twice without catching sight of the blacksmith, Pray turned and took the opposite direction to the one he had been following.

This soon had the effect of precipitating matters.

Each turned one of the corners at the same time, pistol in hand.

As they came together, both fired.

The blacksmith was shot through the heart, while Pray received his adversary's bullet in the arm.

After halting long enough to tie a handkerchief around the wound and stanch the flow of blood, Pray wheeled and went toward the yard where he had left the James boys.

He found them engaged in tying Sam Lane, the detective, hand and foot.

They had not succeeded in overcoming the brave man-hunter without a struggle.

"Kill the spying hound," advised Hank Pray, fiercely. "If you don't, you'll regret it."

"Don't you fear," returned Jesse James, quietly. "He get his deserts, sure enough. But we'll take him in the woods and do the job there."

Pray was satisfied with this statement.

Frank and Jesse James lifted the body of their victim.

and bore it into the bushes toward a spot where they had left their horses.

They had not proceeded far, when the sound of horses' hoofs was heard in their rear.

The human burden was quickly dropped, and each man stood on the defensive.

Soon the head of a horseman came into view.

As he saw the three outlaws, he exclaimed, excitedly: "Here they are, boys. Come on."

Crack! and a bullet from Jesse James' pistol toppled him from his saddle.

The outlaws saw a score of mounted men close behind the man who had fallen, and at a word from Jesse James they left the trail, and took to the bushes.

The pursuers turned and plunged through the trees after them.

Half an hour passed, and Sam Lane was wondering what had become of both friend and foe, when he saw something crawling toward him from the stump of a tree which made him shiver and turn pale with terror.

It was a rattlesnake of the largest size.

Lane rolled over until he brought up against a tree.

The rattlesnake followed him.

Before he could make another movement, his nostrils were assailed by a peculiar and most offensive odor.

The snake had crawled upon his breast, and with head and tail erect, was looking into the helpless man-hunter's eyes.

Lane drew a deep breath, and gave himself up for lost.

At that moment a crackling sound in the bushes was heard, and one of the party of pursuers rode into the trail.

An exclamation of horror escaped him when he saw Lane's awful peril.

He had his rifle in his hand, but he dared not fire for fear of shooting the detective.

And yet he knew that if he did not kill the snake it would dash its fangs into the unfortunate man's neck.

While both men were partially stupefied with fear, and while the snake was coiling to strike, the bushes again parted and another actor appeared on the scene.

It was a dog, a thoroughbred Irish setter, with keen, intelligent eyes.

In an instant it saw the bound detective's peril, and, touching with its belly close to the ground, slowly crept toward the snake.

The latter watched every movement of the setter, as if he realized that a duel to the death was approaching.

On came the dog, creeping slowly as a snail.

The horseman looked on with bated breath.

The end soon came.

When within five feet of the snake, the setter made a dash of almost lightning-like rapidity.

The bound was so sudden that the snake had no time to strike, and, before the two men could realize what happened, the reptile was torn to shreds.

Sam Lane was in a faint when the horseman sprang from the saddle, and bent over him.

CHAPTER II.

THE JAMES BOYS MEET A FRIEND.

Two weeks later, Frank and Jesse James were in Saguache County, Colorado.

They had succeeded in eluding the Missouri officers, but Hank Pray had been captured by Sam Lane a week before, while he was out on a scouting expedition.

The James boys had resolved to rescue him, but not until they had made one raid, and replenished their purses.

After visiting a little mining camp in disguise, they had learned that the stage from Claytonia to Pleasant Grove would carry a well-filled treasure-box on its next trip.

"That's our box," said Jesse.

"Sure," replied Frank, and then they made preparations to secure it.

The next morning after this resolve the stage left Bad Man's Ravine bound for Pleasant Grove.

Missouri Ned was the driver, and beside him sat a tall, honest-faced young man, who had come out from Maine a week before to make his fortune in the land of silver and gold.

Inside were two middle-aged women and a dark-haired man of uncertain age, whose dress and language led his companions to believe that he was a clergyman.

"That's whar Squint-eyed Luke war dropped by Hank Pray," said Missouri Ned to his Yankee companion, as he pointed to a large boulder at the foot of a small hill. "Shot through ther eye, an' sent up ther flume 'thout er groan er a kick."

"This—this air Pray is dead, ain't he?" anxiously queried the other, whose name was Josiah Tewksbury.

"Naw, though he orter be. Sam Lane nailed him a few days ago, an' he's now playin' checkers with his nose in ther Saguache jail. But Pray ain't er patchen ter One-eyed Juan, ther greaser, who got in his work near Pleasant Grove on a gang o' miners as war makin' ther way ter Claytonia with ther dust they'd panned out at Hangtown."

"Did he kill them air miners, mister?"

"Did he? O' course he did. Juan's motter is ther old piratical one—'dead men tell no tales.' He jist naterally plugged 'em both an' robbed 'em arteward."

Mr. Tewksbury began to exhibit considerable nervousness.

"Dew yew calkilate that this air One-eyed Juan is in this part of the country now?" he inquired, all in a tremble.

"Thar's no tellin' whar the varmint mout be," he answered. "He's hyur, thar, an' eve'y whar, an' ther devil helps him ter keep clar of ther sheriffs eve'y time."

Mr. Tewksbury groaned.

Inside the man with the clerical garb was saying to the ladies:

"I am looking for a place where vice is rampant, for I love fighting in the good cause."

"Then go to Sangre de Cristo," said one. "It's Satan's rendezvous, I do believe."

"Hangtown is worse," remarked the other, "for there's shooting and killing there almost every day. One-eyed Juan, the highwayman, was there not long ago with his band, and they had the whole town to themselves and no one dared to oppose them."

"I am going to convert that terrible man," said the clerical stranger, firmly. "Let me once get into his camp, and I will speedily convince him of the error of his ways."

The ladies shook their heads.

"He will murder you before you can open your mouth," said one.

"Last Sunday he went into a church, and made the preacher stand on his head," said the other.

The stranger smiled grimly.

"He would not have made me stand on my head," he replied, with confidence, "for I would have said one little word which would have caused him to fall to his knees and——"

"And what is that word?" interrogated the lady who had last spoken.

"Manulita."

"That is a woman's name."

"It is, and she is the only woman that Juan ever loved. She died last month in my arms, and her last words were: 'See my Juan and implore him for my sake to give up his evil life.'"

The ladies looked at their companion with new interest.

"I may find him before we reach Pleasant Grove," he continued, after a pause.

The faces of the two ladies became suddenly pale with fear.

"Oh, goodness!" exclaimed one, "I hope he won't stop the stage."

"If he does," said the other, faintly, "I will be the most miserable woman alive."

"Why?" asked the stranger, his voice vibrating with kindly sympathy.

"Because I have in my possession over twenty thousand dollars in greenbacks, which I am taking to my husband at Pleasant Grove. It's money to buy a mine."

There ensued a short period of silence.

Then the stranger said, as he fixed his dark eyes on the woman's face:

"I can save you from robbery."

"How?"

"Give the money to me, and it will be safe. Juan would not harm a hair of the head of the man who was kind to his Manulita."

At this moment the voice of Missouri Ned reached the ears of the inside passengers.

"That's a right pert place for a hold-up over yon," he said, "an' Juan——"

"Here, take the money," said the woman, in great agitation, as she took a pocketbook from her bosom.

"And take mine, too," added the other woman. "There is not much money in it, only a few hundred dollars, but I don't want to lose it."

The stranger placed the pocketbooks in a small satchel by his side.

He had hardly done so before the stage came to a sudden standstill, and these ominous words were heard:

"Keep your seats and do as we tell you, or we'll blow your brains out."

The clerical stranger started at the command.

Then he looked out of the side window, and saw two masked men standing in the road.

One had his pistol pointed at the driver's head; the

other stood facing the stage with his weapon pointed at the door.

"Throw down the box," ordered the highwayman, who had the door covered.

Missouri Ned lost no time in obeying.

"Now, wooden-nutmeg, tumble down out of that."

Josiah Tewksbury, who had been shaking like an aspen, was so prompt in complying that he fell all in a heap at the highwayman's feet.

"Spare my life," he cried, piteously, "and I'll dew anything yew want me tew."

"You will, eh? Then pack that box down to the bench and sit on it till I come to you."

"All right, mister."

The Yankee took up the express box, and staggered with it to the point indicated.

While the road-agent was thus occupied, the other was attending to the inside passengers.

"Get out of there, all of you," he called out, harshly, moment after the stage stopped.

The clerical stranger, with a curious smile on his face, was the first to alight.

Then he assisted the two ladies to the ground.

"Throw down your weapons, Mister Man," commanded the highwayman, with his eyes fixed sternly on the clerical stranger, "and then elevate your hands."

"I am a minister of the gospel," returned the latter boldly, "and if I lift up my hands it will be to pray for your wicked heart may be softened."

The highwayman gave a quick start at the sound of the stranger's voice, and then looked at him keenly.

"You're a parson, eh?" he said, slowly.

"I am."

"And what might be your handle?"

"Cole."

"Great Scot! Not——"

In his excitement the robber might have uttered a name that was known over the length and breadth of America, if the other had not quickly interrupted.

"Yes, I am he, the great evangelist of the South. And now I will raise my hands and you may take a filthy dross that at present cumber my unfortunate person."

"No, no," said the woman who had given him twenty thousand dollars, in a low but excited voice. "Remember what you promised."

"Ah! yes, I had forgotten I was to speak the name, 'Manulita.'"

"Yes, yes."

"But this evil man is not One-eyed Juan. He is American."

"Dear, dear! and must I lose that money? Can't——can't you think of another word that will fit him and make him leave us?"

"Come, come," spoke up the highwayman, impatiently, "if you haven't any weapons, point your dukes skyward and quit jabbering."

The clerical stranger looked reproachfully at the masked man, and then raised his hands over his head.

"You are a hard-hearted son of evil," he said, with a sorrowful intonation, "and I doubt if I should be able to convert you if I had you alone."

The highwayman was advancing toward the stranger for the purpose of searching him, when the wo-

whose twenty thousand dollars was at stake, threw herself before him and barred his progress.

"Don't, don't," she almost screamed; "he's got my money, and——"

"He is runnin' away with it," quickly interrupted the robber.

This was the truth, for at the moment the woman stepped between him and the man in the mask, the clerical stranger turned on his heel and ran like a deer down the road in the direction of Josiah Tewksbury and the treasure-box.

Crack, crack! went the highwayman's pistol, but none of the shots reached the body of the fugitive.

"Trust in me," he shouted over his shoulder to the woman, "for I am a runner from Runnerville."

Queer words these for a clergyman to use, but to the woman's unsuspicious ears they were blessed words of encouragement.

To her surprise, the masked robber did not attempt to pursue the flying man.

"Never mind," he said, when he saw the fugitive dart into the bushes a few rods from Tewksbury, "we've got the express box, and I reckon that'll satisfy us."

The other highwayman, who had in the meantime been holding his pistol on the driver, now gave this quick, sharp order:

"Get in the stage, girls, and then you, driver, set your nags a-going for the Grove."

When the stage had gone, the two knights of the road hurried quickly to the treasure-box.

Josiah Tewksbury still sat upon it, for he had not dared to run away, being within pistol range.

"Good boy," said the robber, who had sent him up the road. "You might have skipped out and didn't. And now you shall have your reward. I won't go through you."

"Thank yew," returned the Yankee, faintly. "Yew're very kind."

"So git, vanish, vamoose, clear out, cut sticks, take yourself away."

Tewksbury rose up, and started up the road.

"Not that way. Take to the woods, left-hand side, and keep on going for an hour. If you fail, and turn about, I'll hunt you up and carve your liver. Understand?"

"Ye-yes. I dew, mister."

"Then do as I have told you."

Josiah Tewksbury dashed into the brush, and was seen no more by the two highwaymen.

When he had gone, the clerical stranger stepped into the road.

"By the great horn spoon!" he exclaimed, in joyous accents; "but I never expected to meet you fellows here. Frank, Jess, put it there."

Then Cole Younger shook hands with his old companions.

"Where did you drop from, Cole?" asked Jesse James.

"I'll tell you later. Let's get away with this box first."

It was quickly broken open with a hammer which Frank James produced, and the contents, amounting to upward of ten thousand dollars, were speedily disposed of.

"I've got twenty thousand dollars that will go to swell

the pot," said Cole Younger, as they started away. "Got it from the woman who made the kick."

"Got any more?"

"Boodle?"

"Yes."

"How much?"

"Five thousand or so. And not only have I that in hand, but I've got a scheme in my head for getting away with two hundred thousand."

"How?"

"Looting the county treasury at Hangtown."

"That's a risky job, Cole," remarked Frank James, with a shake of his head.

"No, it isn't. Wait till you hear what the layout is. I'll open up when we get to a safer place."

That night the outlaws camped in the hills, far away from the scene of the stage robbery.

When supper was over, and pipes were lighted, Cole Younger began to talk.

"I came to Colorado, boys," he said, "because things were getting mighty hot for me in Missouri. A week ago I landed at Devil's Gulch, a little mining camp in Custer County, in the rôle of a preacher.

"I hadn't been half a day in the camp before I learned that Jim Miller, Clell's cousin, was in Hangtown. He used to be a gambler, you know, and a friend of ours.

"Well, he'd come to Colorado to better his fortunes, and, being a slick coon, he had worked his points on some of the old-timers at Hangtown, so that he was given a position as night watchman of the courthouse before he had been in town three months."

"Did you see him?" asked Jesse James.

"No, but I ran across Ned Carnes, an old pard of his, who gave me the business. Ned was down to bed rock and had no show of working the miners at Devil's Gulch or Hangtown, either, for all the players were dead on to his tricks at poker.

"When I met him, he was sweeping out saloons for his hash and gin, and was so disreputable-looking that I never would have known him but for his laugh.

"He said that Jim Miller had got into a game with a judge—a high-up coon in Hangtown—and had fingered the pasteboards so well that at the end of a couple of sittings he left the judge broke and ten thousand dollars in his debt, besides.

"The judge didn't take his medicine coolly, but tried to blow his brains out. Jim interfered just in time, and then told the judge that he would give him back his note for ten thousand and half the gold he had won, if the judge would use his influence to have him appointed night watchman at the courthouse.

"The judge consented. Jim had other workers, and between the kit of them they got Jim in."

"What was his object in seeking the place?" queried Frank James.

"To rob the county treasury and skip out. What else? But I think we three will have a hand in that racket."

"You bet," said Frank James, emphatically.

"If we do, we'll fix it so that Jim will come out all right. We'll work the old game by binding and gagging him, and leading the Hangtownites to think that he was an innocent party."

Jesse James nodded his head.

"It can be done, Cole," he said, "if you are in a position to go boldly into Hangtown as the parson."

"Why can't I?"

"Because the woman who lost the twenty thousand will light down on your backbone the moment you show your face in the town."

Cole Younger's face fell.

"That's so," he admitted.

"You can queer that game, though."

"How?"

"By giving up the twenty thousand."

Cole Younger shook his head.

"I am not in the habit of making donations of that kind. It's not in my line."

"But remember what you will probably gain by the operation. Two hundred thousand dollars——"

"Yes, yes, that's so."

"Besides, you'll make yourself solid with every man, woman, and child in Hangtown by returning the money. See?"

"Don't I?" rubbing his hands. "It's the boss scheme, sure."

"And the story you will tell about the way you circumvented the robbers will make you the hero of the hour. You might work in a fight with them—us, you understand—that would add to the sensational interest of the narrative."

"Leave me alone for giving the jays a fill," said Cole Younger, with a confident smile.

"You had better set out in the morning, for if you waited longer you might be arrested before you got there, and then your yarn wouldn't hold water," said Frank James.

"I'll go you one better by setting out to-night."

"Do you know the way?"

"I can find it."

"Then go ahead."

"I'll have the thing fixed inside of twenty-four hours, and then hunt you up."

"If you don't find us here, we'll work around to you, never fear."

An hour later Cole Younger was on his way to Hangtown.

Next morning, while at breakfast, the James boys saw a large body of men approaching.

"The officers," said Jesse, as he jumped to his feet.

The outlaws were high up on a hill, and could see their pursuers without being seen themselves.

There were over twenty men in the posse.

At their head rode the Sheriff of Saguache County.

The James boys hurried away through the bushes, crossed the road, got down into a deep cañon, and followed it until they found themselves in a little valley.

At night they came in sight of a ranch, and saw a number of horses in a field about a quarter of a mile from the house.

"Tired of walking, Frank?" said Jesse James.

"Slightly."

"Reckon we'll ride, then."

They went into the field, and after a little while succeeded in capturing a horse apiece with the aid of ropes they found where a couple of colts had been staked out.

It was so early that no occupant of the house had yet come out.

Jesse James looked at the barn, which was nearer to them than the house, and said:

"I'll bet there are saddles in there."

"Let's ride up and get them, then."

Jesse James was right.

While Frank held the horses, he went into the barn, and soon came out with two saddles.

The outlaws were adjusting them to the animals, when a man came out of the back door of the house.

He gave a surprised look at the James boys, and then shouted:

"Drop those horses, you scoundrels, or I'll have you arrested."

"Go soak your head," Jesse James shouted back.

The man, with an angry imprecation, ran into the kitchen, to return just as the outlaws were mounting the horses, with a rifle in his hands.

Before he could shoot, crack! crack! went the outlaws' revolvers.

The man dropped the rifle, and fell to his knees.

The next moment the James boys were out of range.

They rode until midnight, and two days later, in the evening, they reached Hangtown on foot, and made up as miners.

They were passing a dancehouse, when most peculiar sounds from within caused them to stop at the door and listen.

The long, low room was crowded with people—miners, gamblers, and women.

Groans, wails, cries, shouts of amen, and high above all, the threatening voice of an exhorter greeted their ears.

A revival meeting was in progress.

Jesse James, with a curious expression, looked about for the preacher.

There he was, standing on a large beer-barrel in the center of the room, his face flushed and the words pouring from his lips in a torrent.

"Holy Moses!" said Frank James, in a whisper of amazement, "if it ain't Cole Younger."

CHAPTER III.

THE OUTLAWS' NARROW ESCAPE.

The revivalist was indeed the notorious Western outlaw.

He had played his points so well in the place that not a suspicion of his real character existed. It was not long before Younger caught sight of his comrades.

His eyes flashed with joy.

In a few minutes, he had brought the meeting to a close and was shaking hands with the James boys on the outside.

"How is it?" asked Jesse.

"All fixed, and I would have worked it alone, if you hadn't come. To-night is the time."

"Good! And where is Jim Miller?"

"In the courthouse, at his post, and I have all the tricks for breaking open the safe at an old house up the hill."

"Cole, you're a brick," was Frank James' enthusiastic comment.

They soon separated, in order that Younger might give his attention to some matters connected with his pseudo-religious calling, with the understanding that they should meet at the old house at midnight.

As the James boys moved up the street, a man, who had been one of Cole Younger's congregation, cautiously followed them.

He saw them enter the house, and then he hastened rapidly toward the residence of the sheriff.

That officer was not at home.

"He won't be here much before midnight," said his wife, "for he has gone into the hills with the constable and a force of men to look for the James boys."

"Too bad," said the man.

"What's the matter?" asked the sheriff's wife.

"A little business in his line," was the evasive reply. "I'll come again at half-past eleven."

The man was a Missourian, named Billy Haines.

He had attended the revival meeting, had recognized Cole Younger through his disguise, and overheard the conversation between Younger and the James boys, and had made up his mind to secure help and capture the outlaws.

"If I don't get the sheriff's help, I'll raise a crowd of miners," was his conclusion, as he left the officer's house.

At half-past eleven he returned.

The sheriff was still absent.

He waited fifteen minutes, and then hurried to a miner's boarding-house.

At twelve o'clock Cole Younger entered the house on the hill, and, after a short consultation with the James boys, the three set out for the courthouse.

The streets were deserted, and when they arrived at the side entrance, Jim Miller was found awaiting them in the doorway.

He was surprised and delighted to see Frank and Jesse James.

"The racket will work to a charm now," he said.

He allowed himself to be bound and gagged after he had had a pretended struggle with the outlaws, and had received a number of slight bruises.

The safe was an old-fashioned affair, and did not long resist the operations of the burglars.

When the big door was swung open, and the piles of gold and silver and greenbacks were revealed to their gaze, Jesse James rubbed his hands in satisfaction.

"This is the biggest haul we have ever made," he said.

"We haven't made it yet," remarked Frank James.

"Just the same, old boy, for if we once get into the hills with it, we're hunky."

The outlaws had brought sacks with them, and when they had put in the contents of the safe, each found that the burden he was to carry was all he could stagger under.

About half the two hundred thousand dollars was greenbacks, otherwise they would not have been able to carry all the plunder away.

A short distance from the building was a horse and wagon.

The rig had been provided by Cole Younger.

If they could get the plunder safely in the wagon, and

could start from town without being noticed, the rest would be easy.

Jesse James, with his sack, was in advance as the three outlaws started to leave the building.

Arrived at the door by which they had entered, they met with an unpleasant surprise.

It would not open after it had been unlocked.

Some obstruction had been placed on the outside.

"We have been spotted," whispered Cole Younger, as he deposited his sack on the floor.

"Sure," responded Jesse James.

"It can't be that the sheriff has done this," Cole Younger went on, "for he'd be likely to let us get out of doors and then riddle us with bullets."

"Who can it be, then?" queried Frank James.

"Some coon who is after a divvy, I'll bet a hat," said Jesse James.

All this time not a sound had been heard from the outside.

After waiting for a few minutes, he started empty-handed for the other door at the front of the building.

The bolts were shoved back, and the key was turned in the lock.

"It's life or death, likely," whispered Jesse James, grimly; "but we'll have to take the chances. As I open the door, you two be ready with your revolvers."

"All right," spoke Frank James and Cole Younger together.

Jesse James opened the door quickly.

The night was not so dark but what they could see the street plainly.

No one was in sight.

Jesse James stepped out boldly.

His companions followed him after closing the door.

Around the building they went cautiously until they came to the side entrance.

The door, which had resisted their efforts, was held shut by a heavy iron crowbar.

They looked in all directions, but could find no one.

"This is strange," said Jesse James, "very strange. I don't like it a bit."

"I've got it," said Cole Younger. "The chan that put the crowbar there has gone to get help; he thought he had us corraled when he left, don't you see?"

"I believe you are right, Cole," said Jesse James.

As he spoke he heard the rush of many feet down the street.

"They're coming, boys," he remarked, quietly, "but they won't catch us if we make a run for it."

"I hate to leave that plunder," said Cole Younger, with a sigh.

"So do I," added Frank James.

"We won't leave it, then. Come on."

So saying, he withdrew the crowbar and opened the door.

The sacks were before them.

Each seized one and hurried around the building to the rear.

They were none too quick, for they had scarcely passed out of sight from the street, when a crowd of miners, headed by Billy Haines, came hurrying up.

The removal of the crowbar told Haines what had happened.

"They have escaped," he said, in a rage, "but they can't be far, for I have not been absent from the courthouse more than ten minutes."

Around the building went the man-hunters.

Through an open lot, and running in a direct line for the house on the hill, were the three outlaws.

They had covered half the distance when they were discovered.

With a shout the miners dashed after them.

"We can't make it," puffed Cole Younger, "for they can take two steps to our one. We've got to fight for the money, or give it up."

"Then fight goes," said Jesse James, as he threw his sack down and drew out a brace of revolvers.

His companions followed his example.

The first shots were fired by the outlaws.

The miners, with three of their men disabled, came to a standstill.

Crack! crack! sped the bullets from each side.

Billy Haines, with a bullet in his side, turned and ran.

Several of the miners followed his example.

The outlaws now advanced on their foes.

All had thus far escaped unhurt.

Half-a-dozen miners made a stand against them, and Cole Younger fell, sorely wounded, in the fusillade of bullets that marked the outlaws' approach.

"Give it to 'em, Frank," shouted Jesse James, as he sprang over the body of his comrade. "Let's kill every last one of 'em."

"All right, Jess," was the fierce response, and amid a leaden hail, in which they seemed to bear charmed lives, they rushed upon the little band of miners.

Only three were on their feet when they arrived at arms' length, and of the three two had their hands held over their heads in token of submission.

Billy Haines had not informed them that the burglars at the courthouse were the James boys' gang, for fear that they would back out of the undertaking.

Therefore, when they heard the brothers addressing each other as "Frank" and "Jesse" their courage oozed out at their finger-tips.

The miner who had not held up his hands was too greatly overcome by fear to make a movement.

A bullet from Jesse James' revolver stretched him beside his fallen companions.

"Now," said Frank James to the two miners whose hands were in the air, "obey our orders, and your lives shall be spared. Forward, march."

He pointed toward the sacks.

The miners promptly obeyed.

Jesse James relieved them of their weapons as they marched along.

Cole Younger was trying to rise to his feet when they reached him.

Frank James gave him his arm, and supported him to the sacks.

Each miner was ordered to take up a sack.

Jesse James managed the third.

The march was then taken to the old house, and beyond it to the horse and wagon.

As the sacks of plunder were being deposited in the wagon, loud shouts down the street gave warning that

the citizens had been aroused, and that another attack might be expected if they remained where they were.

Cole Younger was lifted into the bed of the wagon, bleeding profusely from a wound in the side, Frank James taking his place beside him.

Jesse James gave the horse a cut with his whip just as the mob of citizens hove in sight, and at a gallop toward Claytonia went the outlaws and their plunder.

Half-way to Claytonia they saw coming toward them a band of mounted men.

It was the sheriff of Saguache County and a posse, returning from the hills after an unsuccessful hunt after the outlaws.

"It's the sheriff, sure," said Cole Younger, "for he went in this direction."

Their situation was a desperate one.

Behind them were the citizens of Hangtown, before them a larger force of armed men, intent upon their capture.

What to do, was the question.

Jesse James' quick brain soon evolved a scheme that promised a way out of the difficulty.

"The sheriff knows you, Cole," he said, "as a revivalist."

"He thinks a heap of me, Jesse."

"Good. And he won't likely spot Frank and me, for we are disguised, and in the best of company—yours. See?"

"Yes, yes."

"Now, we'll shove these sacks to the front, under the seat, put this blanket I'm sitting on over them, and when the sheriff and his men come up you can give them some kind of a fill. Think you're clear-headed enough to do it?"

"Yes. Frank has fixed up that hole in my side, and I reckon I can play well for a few minutes."

"All right, then."

"Hold on a jiffy," put in Frank James. "This snap may work, and again it may not. Let's take out the greenbacks and hide 'em about our persons, so in case we're obliged to leave the sacks we will be one hundred thousand dollars in, anyhow."

"Sensible idea," said Cole Younger.

After the greenbacks were removed, the sacks were disposed of as suggested by Jesse James, and Cole Younger was sitting up in the bed of the wagon, with his back against the seat, when the sheriff and his posse met them.

"Hello, Casson," called out Younger. "What luck?"

The sheriff heard the false revivalist's voice, and at once answered:

"Bad luck. The rascals are sharper than weasels. But where are you going at this time of night?"

"To Yank's, beyond Claytonia. I have arranged to hold a meeting there to-morrow night, and, to get there in time, I have got to make an all-night journey. These gentlemen"—indicating Frank and Jesse James—"are the committee from the Pine Hill district, who have the matter in charge. They came for me while I was exhorting in the dancehouse a few hours ago."

This explanation satisfied the sheriff, and he was about to order his men to move on, when one of them, an old mountaineer, named Jacks, spoke up.

"These chaps are from Pine Hill, are they?"

"Yes," said Cole Younger, boldly.

"H'm. And what mout be their names?"

"Jake and Bill Johnson."

The mountaineer rode up close to the wagon and scrutinized the countenances of the disguised James boys.

"Johnson, eh? Thar's but one Johnson up thar, an' his name's Pete."

"We're his nephews, just arrived from the East," said Jesse James, quickly.

"When'd yer 'rive?"

"Three days ago."

"Been with yer unk all ther time?"

"No, only one day."

"What day?"

"Yesterday."

"Sure?"

"Sure."

"Well, then, if you were, I reckon Johnson must er hid yer up ther chimbley, or in ther rain-water tank, fer I was thar all day yisterday an' ther day before, an' I never seen hide ner hair of ye."

Jesse James saw the situation was becoming dangerous, but before he could make a reply, Cole Younger spoke.

"They are certainly good, pious gentlemen," he earnestly asserted, "for they led in prayer last evening, and——"

"I think you have been imposed upon," interrupted Sheriff Casson, quietly, "especially as the wagon and the nag they're driving never came from Yank's, but belong to Dolan's livery stable, in Hangtown."

Crack!

A pistol-bullet toppled the sheriff over as the words left his mouth, and a savage cut of the whip sent the horse plunging out of the crowd of man-hunters.

Crack! crack! crack! went the revolvers of the outlaws, as the horse went forward, all before the sheriff's men could recover from their surprise and fire a shot.

"Duck heads!"

This warning from Jesse James came an instant before a sheet of flame leaped forth from the rifles of the outlaws' foes.

The balls struck the woodwork of the wagon, and cut the air about the outlaws, but none of them reached their bodies.

A few rods ahead of them the road turned sharply to the left to avoid a gulch.

Jesse James, whose wits were most active when in the midst of danger, gave the horse another cut with the whip, and, as the animal went on at a mad gallop, he issued this command:

"The moment we turn the bend jump, both of you, into the clump of bushes on the left."

They were at the spot the next moment.

The wagon turned the corner and was out of sight of the pursuers, who were about fifty yards behind.

Frank James and Cole Younger jumped for the bushes.

As they did so, Jesse James turned the horse's head toward the gulch, and for the last time applied the whip.

The maddened animal gave a mighty leap forward and went over the embranchment, carrying the wagon with him.

There was a sheer descent of fifty feet, and at the bottom was a mass of jagged rocks.

But Jesse James did not share the fate of the horse.

He was on his feet when he gave the animal his parting cut, and he took a flying leap into the bushes just as the horse made the terrible downward plunge.

The bushes extended for half a mile up a steep hill, and the three outlaws had crawled several rods when the band of pursuers reached the bend.

Beyond the bend, the road took a straight shoot for half a mile, and in the moonlight its blue-clay bed for the whole distance showed up, clear and distinct.

The sheriff's party halted at the bend.

"The wagon couldn't have gone into the brush," said the mountaineer who had come from Pine Hill, "and therefore——"

"It's down there," put in another, quickly, as he pointed to the gulch.

There were dark shadows below, but a rift of moonlight crossed it where a crevasse cut the gulch on the opposite side.

The light showed the wreck of the wagon and the dead horse, and what, at that distance, appeared to be prostrate human forms.

Half an hour later the man-hunters were beside the wreck, only to discover the cheat that had been practiced upon them.

The human bodies turned out to be sacks of gold and silver.

CHAPTER IV.

JESSE JAMES' CLEVER RUSE.

Hank Pray's mother and sister lived in Bullion City, Saguache County, and Jesse James found himself on the outskirts of the place two days after the exciting adventures at Hangtown.

Cole Younger had been left behind at a friend's cabin, his wound not permitting him to accompany them, and Frank James, who was not feeling well, had determined to remain with Cole a few days, and then rejoin his brother.

Bullion City had sprung up like a mushroom, upon the discovery of valuable mines in one of the cañons of the La Garita Mountains, and now boasted of a population of three thousand souls, composed of miners, adventurers, and the heterogeneous mass of humanity that goes to make up a new mining settlement.

Jesse James made camp in a ravine within sight of Bullion City, where he intended to remain until nightfall.

About dusk he espied a horseman coming in his direction.

As he rode nearer Jesse James uttered a joyous cry:

"Shoot me for a jaybird if it isn't the Giraffe."

This was the name given to James Starlight, a tall, cadaverous-looking mountaineer, who had at one time been a member of the James boys' gang of outlaws.

Liz Pray, Hank's sister, was his sweetheart.

"Come just in time to help in getting Hank out o' quad," he said, when he had shaken hands. "I have organized a band of brave boys for the purpose, and am now on my way to see one of them, and notify him to be at the meeting to-night in Coyote Cañon."

"How many can you get together?" asked Jesse James.

"Twenty."

"Good. And will they be at the meeting to-night?"

"Yes. And you must be there, too, to take the leadership."

The Giraffe soon afterward took his leave of the outlaw.

At eight o'clock that evening Jesse James was in a large room in a lonely frame house in Coyote Cañon.

Around him were grouped twenty muscular and stern-faced men.

The Giraffe had already given them a name.

"These," he said, with an air of pride, as Jesse James entered the room, "are the Black Agents of Saguache."

The outlaw chief soon had the names of the twenty by heart, and the smile that lit up his dark face as he gazed at them evidenced his satisfaction at their appearance.

One—he had been the Giraffe's lieutenant—became a favorite with him at once.

He was a blond Hercules, with a face as smooth as a baby's.

His name was John Staples, but he was known to his companions only as Big John.

Cal Fiske, lean, cadaverous, and loose-jointed, with but one eye and a hawk nose, soon stood second in the bandit chieftain's estimation.

He was a Missourian, and had served with the Youngers before their affiliation with the James boys.

"We kin do ther trick," was his emphatic comment when the plan of rescue had been fully outlined, "ez easy ez rollin' off a log."

"It will be no easy job," remarked Big John, slowly, and with his eyes fixed thoughtfully on the floor, "but we'll make it, though, I'm positive."

Jesse James lit a cigar and took a few puffs before replying.

"It's the boldest game that has even been tried in Colorado," he remarked, "and if it doesn't make the biggest sensation of the year in this neck o' woods, then I'll be a right smart peg out of my reckoning."

He arose to his feet—he had been sitting on a bench—and gave his final instructions.

"Our work must be quick, to be sure," were his words, "and the first man that shows the white feather, I will shoot down in his tracks."

The scheme proposed was indeed a bold one.

Hank Pray, who had cut a wide swath of crime in Colorado before his association with the James boys, had already been tried for murder at Saguache, but would be brought to Bullion City the next morning to receive his sentence.

The removal from Saguache to Bullion City had been ordered by the court for the reason that the jail at the latter place was larger and stronger.

Fears of a rescue had also prompted the court to defer sentence of death until the criminal had been lodged in Bullion City jail.

This little arrangement was easily made, for the judge had a traveling circuit, and could hold court in any town he pleased within his jurisdiction.

The band of Black Agents was about to disperse, after the conference at the lonely house, when Liz Pray burst in upon them, trembling with excitement.

She was small in stature, but as lithe and supple as a panther, and could stand as much hard service in the saddle as the average man, while as for the manipulation of a rifle or revolver, not a cowboy in the West could surpass her.

Her raven-black hair, her dark, oval face, her flashing black eyes, and her wild passionate nature, betrayed the Indian blood which had come from some remote ancestor among the Cherokees.

Her story was a startling one.

She had been up the cañon in the afternoon, and, while laving her hands in the cool stream which flowed through it, had been surprised and captured by Sam Lane, the detective.

Being much of the time alone, she had got into the habit of talking to herself, and before the detective showed himself, she had said enough to inform him that the rescue of her borthor was to be attempted on the morrow.

Lane carried his captive to a deserted cabin near by, but while he was binding her with cords, a friend came to her aid in the person of a mountaineer who had agreed to become a member of the band of Black Agents.

A blow with a club had knocked the detective senseless.

Jesse James was for going to the cabin instantly and putting a bullet through Sam Lane's head.

But Liz Pray objected.

"Let Hank do ther job," she said, "for he's sworn ter lay Lane out ef he gits cl'ar o' jail."

"All right," said Jesse James. "We'll rescue Hank and then celebrate the event by giving Sam Lane his everlasting quietus."

But the bandit chief did not go to sleep that night until he had assured himself that the detective was secure against escape.

Lane was found in the cellar of the cabin, tightly bound, and with a muscular mountaineer as guard.

* * * * *

At nine o'clock of the next morning, a horseman rode up to the principal saloon and dancehouse of Bullion City.

Inside the establishment he found a crowd of miners discussing the arrival of Hank Pray.

The prisoner had reached the jail under a strong guard about half an hour before.

The horseman, who looked like a cowboy, with his long, yellow hair, and his heavy mustache and goatee, called all hands up for a drink, and when the crowd had readily responded, he expressed his sentiments with vigorous emphasis.

"Hanging's none too good for him," he said, "an' if I had the doin's of it, I'd swing him up afore dark."

"'Twouldn't be a bad idea," said a short, thick-necked sport, with a stubby red mustache and a head as smooth as a billiard ball, who rejoiced in the name of Toothpick Joe, "for I have heard rumors of a rescue. And if we carry out the sentence, which will be pronounced at ten o'clock, we'll be simply doing the sheriff a favor by taking an unpleasant job off his hands."

"Right you are," returned the long-haired cowboy, "an' if you all will stan' by me I'll engineer ther racket ac-
ter Hoyle."

It did not take many minutes to bring every man in the saloon to the cowboy's way of thinking.

There was a peculiar smile on his face when he found that the scheme that had induced his entrance into the saloon was likely to succeed.

"Set 'em up again, barkeep," he called out, jovially, "an' put out ther strongest whisk you've got in ther shebang."

After the second round of drinks had been disposed of, the cowboy marshaled his forces in the dancehall at the rear.

Thirty-two men, strong, active, and determined, the flower of Bullion City, so to speak, stood before him.

Sinking his voice almost to a whisper, he thus addressed them:

"My plan, gentlemen, is this: Ter seize ther skunk the minute he leaves ther courtroom, arter ther sentence. Snatch him bald-headed, you understand, when he gets to ther steps that go down to ther street. What do you think of it?"

"It's the boss plan," spoke Toothpick Joe, the sport, "and we'll call the turn on him in a minute."

The cowboy again smiled a peculiar smile.

"I thought I'd hit ther bull's-eye," he said, with satisfaction. "Now"—speaking quickly and seriously—"there's only one sure way of working ther snap and gettin' dead shet of a hitch, an' that's ter keep away from the courtroom until ther time fer action comes."

"But how will we know the time?" objected one of the miners, "if we are not in court when the sentence is pronounced."

"Leave that part of ther peppergrain ter me," answered the cowboy, quickly. "I'll be in court, and I'll give ther signal for you all ter come forward."

Another miner growled out something about not seeing the sense of such a proceeding.

"I'll make you understand the sense of it," said the cowboy, earnestly, "when I tell you that ther sheriff has got an idee in his noddle that a vigilante gang is goin' ter crowd ther courtroom an' make a break for Pray when ther jedge gits through with his sentencin' 'chin music."

"That alters the case, then," rejoined the miner.

"Of course it does, and when ther sheriff finds ther courtroom with but a slim scatterin' of Bullionites in it, he'll come to ther conclusion that he's been dead off his nut erbout ther vigilantes, an' so will take things easy. By ther way," he added, as if the idea had just occurred to him, "thar's a hall hyarabouts, I reckon?"

"Yes; two doors below is a hall the Masons intend to occupy in a few days," said Toothpick Joe.

"Good!"

"It is vacant now, and the janitor—Jim Barnes, there"—pointing to one of the crowd—"has the key."

At half-past nine the cowboy and his crowd of vigilantes were in the hall.

Fifteen minutes later two men, sent out on a proselytizing expedition, returned with fifteen converts.

The majority of the prominent men of the place were now congregated in one spot, under the leadership of a total stranger.

The peculiarity of the situation did not strike any of them, so interested were they in the cause of Judge

Lynch, until the sensational occurrences of the day were in full blast.

At five minutes to ten o'clock the cowboy left the hall. Toothpick Joe, the sport, accompanied him to the door.

A few whispered words and they parted.

The crowd in the hall heard the key turn in the lock, but supposed it was the act of Toothpick Joe.

In this they were mistaken.

The cowboy had turned the key from the outside, while the sport stood facing the lock from the inside.

As he walked away the cowboy chuckled softly.

"Pretty slick, if I do say it," he said to himself. "I haven't done any acting lately, and there was a good chance of failure before me when I started in. But it's all right now. I've got the men I had feared most corraled in a hall, which they won't likely escape from until the work is in good shape or over, and now nothing remains but to go into the courtroom and wait for the chance to strike."

The cowboy was Jesse James, but he had disguised himself so well that he passed unnoticed by men who had seen him frequently in the past.

As he entered the courtroom, which was but a block away from the Masonic Hall, Hank Pray was just rising to his feet to receive the sentence of death in accordance with the verdict of the jury.

Casting his eyes over the room, Jesse James saw about fifty persons seated on benches.

Of these twenty-one were members of the band known as the Black Agents of Saguache.

"Hank Pray," began the judge in a grave, impressive voice, "you have been convicted of murder in the willful and malicious killing of Holbart Jones, an express messenger, while in the lawful discharge of his duty as custodian of the treasure-box of his employer, and it now becomes my painful duty to impose on you the judgment of the law."

The judge paused a moment to wipe the perspiration from his face.

Before he could continue, a man rushed excitedly into the courtroom.

Jesse James gave one glance at his face, and an exclamation of rage and dismay escaped his lips.

The new-comer was Sam Lane, the detective.

CHAPTER V.

THE RESCUE OF HANK PRAY.

For one moment, and one moment only, Jesse James stood irresolute.

Then, as he saw Sam Lane beckon to the sheriff, who was standing beside the prisoner, he made up his mind as to his course of action.

Advancing quickly to the detective's side, he rapidly whispered:

"I'm a new deputy sworn in to help Casson, the sheriff, in case of a rescue. Come in here."

He pointed to the open door of the jury-room beside which the detective stood.

Lane saw the sheriff moving toward him and, unsuspecting of treachery, stepped into the little room.

Jesse James followed, and instantly closed the door.

Crack! went his pistol, as Sam Lane turned his face toward him.

This was the signal for the Black Agents to act.

As the detective fell to the floor with a bullet in his side—it had missed his heart by a hair's breadth—Big John jumped to his feet in the courtroom and leveled his pistol at the sheriff, who was then within a few feet of the door of the jury-room.

The Giraffe covered the judge, while the nineteen remaining Black Agents gave their attention to the lawyers and innocent spectators.

But one man was brave enough to oppose this belligerent demonstration.

That man was Casson, the sheriff, as plucky an officer as ever waged war against the criminals of Colorado.

The wound he had received near Hangtown had been a slight one, and he had soon recovered.

His hand was on his revolver, and he would have fired at Big John regardless of consequences, if Jesse James had not suddenly opened the door at his back and dealt him a stunning blow on the head which stretched him senseless.

Bending over the body of his victim, the leader of the bandits quickly abstracted a bunch of keys from his pocket.

One of these fitted the handcuffs which ornamented the wrists of Hank Pray, the prisoner.

As Jesse James hurried forward past the group of frightened spectators and the Black Agents, who had them covered, the quavering voice of the judge was heard.

"Gentlemen, gentlemen," he expostulated, "you must not do this. You must not take the law into your own hands and hang him. Do not molest the prisoner, and he will meet his just deserts at the appointed time."

Jesse James burst into a harsh laugh.

"I say, old mutton-head," he retorted, "you've made a big mistake. We're not going to make Hank play the leading part at a necktie party. Not by a large majority, old son. We're going to give him his freedom."

"What!" gasped the judge. "You don't mean to say—"

"Yes, I do, you bet your boots. Come, Hank, step this way and I'll relieve you of your bracelets."

But as the prisoner started forward to comply with Jesse James' request, the judge suddenly hurled a paper weight at the bandit leader's head, and then, opening the drawer of his desk, whipped out two English bulldog pistols.

The weight missed Jesse James and struck a spectator full in the face, causing him to topple over against a bench and utter a yell of pain.

Two reports rang out an instant later, but the judge was not responsible for them.

It is true that he was about to supplement his first act of resistance by discharging a brace of bullets at the outlaw chief, but fate, in the person of the Giraffe, conspired to foil his purpose.

The two reports came from the pistol of the late leader of the Black Agents, and back in his chair sank Bullion City's representative of law and justice, mortally wounded.

This terrible deed inspired some of the spectators to

sudden courageous action, while it augmented the fright of others, causing them to rush pell-mell for the door, despite the stern warnings that were shouted after them.

But Jesse James and his bandit crew were equal to the occasion.

As Big John sprang forward to reach the door and prevent the exodus, the outlaw chief dealt blows right and left with a clubbed revolver, and soon had a score of Bullionites stretched in the aisle, and on the benches.

He had just knocked a burly miner to the floor when a chair descended on his head and sent him, half-stunned, to his knees.

The assailant was the sheriff, who had recovered his senses a moment after the judge had been shot.

The desire to take the dangerous bandit alive had induced him to use the chair instead of his revolver.

His eyes sparkled with triumphant joy when he saw the dreaded criminal sink under the blow.

Casting his eyes about the room, in which the wildest excitement reigned, and perceiving that the Black Agents were all engaged, he thought that he saw his way clear to seizing the half-insensible outlaw and dragging him through the rear door, a few feet away, and on to a place of security.

Kicking the chair aside, he grasped Jesse James by the coat-collar, and lifted him to his feet.

As he did so something happened that made him relax his hold and gasp for breath.

That something was a kick, which caught him squarely in the stomach.

Before he could recover his breath and his presence of mind, he was hurled violently upon a bench, and there beaten into insensibility.

Meanwhile Big John and the Giraffe, and Cal Fiske at the front door, had succeeded in preventing the escape of any of the Bullionites.

Nearly all of the latter were armed, and some had used their pistols, but they had not been quick enough to make their bullets tell.

Four lay dead in the vestibule, and the others were cowed into submission when Jesse James strode forward, looking anxiously to right and left.

"Where's Hank Pray?" he asked.

"Give it up," responded Big John. "I saw him leave the prisoners' box to come to you, but I don't know what became of him when the judge whirled in with his paper weight."

"He's in good hands," shouted a voice at the rear door.

Jesse James gave a start of angry surprise when he saw that the speaker was Sam Lane.

There was a window in the jury-room overlooking the street, and the detective, though badly wounded by the bullet from Jesse James' pistol, had managed to raise it and crawl through to the sidewalk.

As he leaned against the building, breathing heavily, and with his hands pressed against his side after this exertion, he saw Hank Pray emerge from the alley back of the courthouse.

The prisoner had escaped by the rear door when the judge made his attack on Jesse James.

At the moment he believed the odds were against his friends, and being handcuffed and unable to render them efficient assistance, he had resolved to take advantage of

confusion, and make a bolt for the rear door, hoping find a horse outside which he could mount and make escape with.

Summoning all his remaining strength, Lane ran toward him with a drawn revolver.

"Halt!" he hoarsely commanded, "or I'll scatter your ins over the pavement."

Hank Pray came to a standstill, for not only was the detective in front of him, only a few feet away, but behind were several Bullionites, who were hurrying toward the courthouse, to ascertain the cause of the shooting.

When the prisoner had surrendered, Sam Lane turned over to a couple of citizens, and then, with the others, started for the rear door of the courthouse.

Jesse James gave him one look, and then, with the cry, "Hoot the spy down, boys!" he let fly with his revolver. Lane escaped instant death by ducking his head.

A fusillade of bullets from the weapons of the Black Agents quickly followed Jesse James' shot.

The latter, with the sharp command, "Follow me, half dozen of you," made the next move by opening the front door and dashing out.

He had reached the sidewalk with his men, and was in sight of the detective and his force of miners, when the door of Masonic Hall was burst open, and the crowd of Bullionites, who had been temporarily caged, rushed into the street.

At their head was Toothpick Joe.

Deceived by the false cowboy's smooth speech, he had assented to the locking of the door on the representation that it was a matter of expediency.

But when the cries of excited citizens outside had reached his ears, telling him that he had been made a fool by a friend of Hank Pray, his stocky frame trembled with rage, and he resolved to checkmate the false cowboy-vigilantes' game, even if he lost his life in the attempt.

The door was beaten down and a rush to the courtroom was begun.

Jesse James saw the on-coming force of enemies, nearly as strong, and uttered a shrill whistle.

Instantly the band of Black Agents came pouring out of the courthouse.

Realizing the gravity of the situation, they began to jump lead into Toothpick Joe's posse, at the same time uttering wild and savage cries.

When the battle upon the street opened, Jesse James and his six agents made a dash for the miners who held Hank Pray in custody.

Crack! crack! crack! went the pistols, and in less time than it takes to tell it, the man who had been brought to Bullion City that morning to receive the sentence of death, was surrounded by his friends, a free man.

Hastily producing the bunch of keys taken from Sheriff Asson's pocket, Jesse James unlocked Pray's handcuffs, and then thrust a pistol into his hand.

Then he wheeled quickly to give his assistance to the force that was opposing the band of Bullionites.

As he did so, his eyes fell upon the bodies of two men, lying across the other.

The one underneath was the Giraffe, and he was stone dead.

He had long been troubled with heart disease, and he had raised his pistol to fire at Sam Lane, when a spasm of pain in its acutest form seized him, and he staggered forward in the throes of death.

The detective caught him in his arms, but fainted from loss of blood from the wound in his side, as he was attempting to ease the body of the bandit to the ground.

"Whoopee! We're a-comin'. Git back an' give the gal room."

With yells and shouts came a body of horsemen, about a dozen in number, from down the street, and in the rear of Toothpick Joe's band of Bullionites.

Jesse James' dark, stern face took on a look of grim satisfaction.

The new-comers were friends, and at their head, with her long, black hair flying in the wind, was Liz Pray, in the act of raising a Winchester to her shoulder.

CHAPTER VI.

JESSE JAMES TO THE RESCUE.

The horsemen who had so suddenly come to the aid of Jesse James were a band of moonshiners, who had just arrived from Missouri.

They were headed by Simon Hook, an uncle of Liz Pray.

He had stopped at her home and had there learned of the predicament Hank Pray was in.

Liz Pray had already started for the courtroom. The horsemen needed no urging to press forward to the rescue of Hank.

On their way they overtook Liz Pray, and, with her at their head, they were soon galloping toward the business portion of Bullion City.

The first person they met was the Black Agent who had been detailed to guard Sam Lane at the band's rendezvous.

He was on foot, and nearly out of breath from rapid running.

When he was informed of the mission of Simon Hook and his moonshiners, he expressed his satisfaction in a whoop that could have been heard blocks away.

"Ther detec' played possum on me," he said, as he mounted behind Jake Whinn, "and I'd be willing to lose an arm for a chance to get even. While I was at ther head of ther stairway, what does ther sly skunk do, but yell out that ther cords were cuttin' into his pizen flesh an' near about killin' him.

"Like a blasted fool, what did I do but slide down ter try an' make him easier; but no sooner had I reached the cellar than he jumped up and gimme a sockdolger in ther jaw that knocked me over. I was plumb paralyzed for a minute, an' during that minute Lane sashayed out o' ther cellar an' away. You see he'd slipped out o' ther cords, an' worked me fer a sucker."

Whinn was the only member of the party who heard the Black Agent's explanation, and he paid little attention to it, for his eyes were fixed on the tall dome of the courthouse, not a quarter of a mile ahead.

The sounds of firing made the moonshiners put their horses to the top of their speed.

As Simon Hook's men galloped down Bullion City's main street, Liz Pray's sharp eyes and quick brain took in the situation that was presented by the shouts and shots of the opposing groups near the courthouse.

"Now, Uncle Simon," she said, in a sharp, imperious tone, "we must git in an' show Jess an' Hank what we are good for."

"Ther galoots in front of us need our 'tention fust, I reckon, Liz," he quickly rejoined.

"Yes."

She had her rifle at her shoulder an instant later, and opened the ball for the moonshiners by sending a bullet through a tall Bullionite's head.

Crack! crack! followed the rifles of her supporters, and the force of Toothpick Joe, thus assailed from behind, broke ranks in confusion, and such as had escaped the bullets of the horsemen ran to the shelter of the buildings on either side of the street.

Jesse James was not idle during this sharp and effective demonstration in his favor.

Placing himself at the head of the Black Agents, he drove the demoralized Bullionites "from pillar to post," as the saying is, and only desisted from his savage work when the main street of Bullion City was deserted, save for the presence of his own men, and the dead and dying of the enemy.

But his victory had a sting in it, for when he went back to the spot where he had left the wounded detective and the dead Giraffe, the body of the latter only was found.

Sam Lane had either been removed by some of his friends during the heat of the conflict, or had managed, unaided, to reach a place of safety.

Jesse James, with a black brow, searched the courthouse and the buildings adjacent, but no trace of the man he so bitterly hated could be found.

Liz Pray met him as he came out of a saloon.

Her face was pale, and her teeth were tight set, but her eyes showed no trace of weeping.

"Jeems Starlight is dead," she said, in a cold monotone, "an' I reckon you know ther man thet killed him."

The Missouri outlaw had his own opinion on the subject, but his hatred for the detective caused him to reply:

"When I saw the Giraffe, fifteen minutes ago, he was lying on the body of Sam Lane."

"Then Sam Lane's bit ther dust, too?" she cried, with an expression of acute disappointment.

"I don't think so, Liz."

"Where is he, then?" she exclaimed, with eyes blazing with the ferocity of a tigress.

"That's what I'd give a thousand dollars to know. I've been looking for him, but I can't find hide nor hair of the cuss."

Liz Pray's head sank upon her breast."

Jesse James was regarding her pityingly, when she suddenly looked up.

"I reckon I know whar to find him," she said, slowly.

"Where is the place?"

"At his cousin's in ther next block. Ther cousin's a doc."

"We'll go there at once."

As Jesse James called the Black Agents and moonshiners together, he saw armed men running from stores

and houses toward the marketplace, a few hundred yards below the Masonic Hall.

He easily guessed what the movement threatened.

The Bullionites had been defeated in their opening battle with the robbers, but they had rallied, and, with fresh arms and new recruits, were preparing to make a second attempt to overcome Hank Pray's rescuers.

The fact that many of their kindred and friends had been slain had much to do with rousing them to renewed endeavor to wipe out the gang of desperadoes who had taken possession of the town.

Toothpick Joe, who had escaped the bullets of the moonshiners, was the leader in the new enterprise, and when Jesse James turned his eyes toward the marketplace, the little sport had over fifty men ready to do his bidding.

The robber's force was smaller, but the reckless leader never hesitated for an instant as to what course he should pursue.

A few quick commands, and he was at the head of the Black Agents and moonshiners, and riding boldly toward the marketplace.

The capture of Sam Lane must be deferred.

Toothpick Joe fired the first shot, and a Black Agent tumbled from his horse and ceased to breathe.

Then the shots came thick and fast, the fight ending in a terrific hand-to-hand struggle.

This time the miners of Bullion City, who formed the larger portion of Toothpick Joe's command, fought with a courage and fearlessness that soon had its effect upon the onslaught of the foe.

Horses were shot down, and pistol, rifle, and knife were brought into play, as the occasion demanded.

In the thickest of the fight were Jesse James and Big John.

The former saw Liz Pray backed against the side of a building with half a dozen miners in front of her, whose desire seemed to be to take her alive, and he was about to spring to her assistance when a pistol bullet struck him in the neck, making a terrible wound, but luckily for him not cutting the jugular or the windpipe.

It was then that he thought of the dynamite bomb which he had displayed in the secret council of the Black Agents.

It was in his hand, and he had wheeled to hurl it at the force of miners in his rear, when a stone, thrown by a powerful hand, struck him on the back of the head knocking him senseless to the ground.

His assailant was Toothpick Joe, and the game little sport would have finished his work by making a bullet follow the stone, but for the quick interposition of Big John.

Cal Fiske and Simon Hook came to his assistance when he was being hard pressed, and the trio had succeeded in beating back the mob of savage miners at the moment that Jesse James fell.

Big John struck Toothpick Joe down, and had the outlaw chief in his strong arms, and was looking about for a place of temporary safety, when he heard the Bullionites about Liz Pray utter a series of triumphant yells.

Hank Pray had been desperately wounded at the beginning of the second battle, but had managed to reach the shelter of a wagon standing in front of the building—

general merchandise store, which had been vacated and closed when the sensational occurrences of the day opened where his sister had soon afterward retreated.

Here he remained, discharging his revolver whenever Bullionite presented a good target, until his sister, hard pressed by the miners, reached the store door.

"Now we've got yer, ye ornery little devil," shouted a big miner, and pressing forward, in reckless disregard of the pointed revolver, would have thrown his arms about her, had she not pressed the trigger as his hands were about to touch her person.

The bullet plowed through his brain, and he fell at her feet, dead.

Quick upon the heels of the report, she threw her left hand back and grasped the knob of the door, in the hope that it might turn.

It did not occur to her at this moment of desperate need that her peril might be greater if the door should open to admit her.

It was not locked, the proprietor being in such a hurry to get away from the locality that he had time only to close it, and as she darted in a score of miners dashed after her with triumphant cries.

Half of their number succeeded in entering the store. The remainder were shot down by Hank Pray, Cal Fiske, Big John, and Simon Hook.

In the street, a handful of Black Agents were contending with a large force of miners, who had been receiving constant accession to their numbers ever since they had made their first bold stand against the outlaws.

Into the store rushed the four bandits, Big John in the lead, with the still insensible body of Jesse James in his arms.

The last to enter was Hank Pray, who had just strength enough to close and lock the door.

Just beyond the entrance was a keg of whisky used for sampling.

Big John allowed Cal Fiske and Simon Hook to pass him, and then laying the body of the outlaw chief on the floor, seized a glass and turned the faucet of the keg. A portion of the liquor thus obtained was forced down Jesse James' throat.

He opened his eyes just as an exciting scene was transpiring in the counting-room at the farther end of the store.

Liz Pray had rushed into the little compartment, the miners after her.

After them came Cal Fiske and Simon Hook. Finding herself like a rat in the corner, she had instantly turned her revolver upon her pursuers.

But it had been emptied of all its chambers, and when this fact was brought to her notice, she flung the weapon at the head of the nearest miner and then seized a pair of scissors from the desk, and prepared for a desperate resistance.

The miners could have easily shot her down, but a feeling that it would be an unworthy act restrained them.

The woman, though vested with the courage and recklessness of a man, must yet be treated with a certain sort of consideration.

Crack! crack! went the pistols of Cal Fiske and Simon Hook at the door of the counting-room just as Liz Pray grasped the scissors.

Hank Pray, on his knees, at the front door, in a weak attempt to bandage his wounds, staggered to his feet, and took a few steps toward her, only to fall in a faint at the feet of Big John, who was then tying a handkerchief about Jesse James' wounded neck.

The firing outside had suddenly ceased after the beginning of the conflict within the store.

"They are in there," cried a voice, "and we'll corral every mother's son of them, if you'll act according to my directions."

"Go ahead, Joe. You're the man for us," answered another voice.

"Then a dozen of you go to the rear, while the rest of us will manage the front."

Jesse James arose to his feet as the last words were spoken.

A savage light shone in his eyes.

Resting one hand on the broad shoulder of Big John, with the other he drew the dynamite bomb from his pocket.

As the door was smashed in, he let the terrible missile fly.

Instantly there was a report like thunder, the building shook as if in the throes of an earthquake, and then all was still.

CHAPTER VII.

A BRAVE WOMAN'S SHOT.

The dynamite bomb wrought terrible havoc.

Toothpick Joe's Bullionites were scattered like chaff before the wind, and few lived to tell the tale in after days.

The force of the explosion was felt within the building, and a Black Agent and a miner came rushing from the counting-room, pell-mell, to behold Jesse James, Big John, and Hank Pray lying in a heap in the middle of the store, the whole front of the building torn away, and a ghastly spectacle on the sidewalk and in the street.

In that exciting moment the miners forgot their errand into the store, and were hurrying out to ascertain the extent of the catastrophe, when the sharp crack of pistols arrested their steps.

The four miners—two had been in the counting-room—turned to meet a sudden death at the hands of Jesse James and his four associates.

The outlaw chief and Big John had not been injured to speak of by the explosion, but when they turned from a savage contemplation of the bodies of the miners to look at Hank Pray, they found that he was dead.

"And all o' this racket's been fer nothin'," grumbled Simon Hook.

"No, it hasn't," responded Jesse James, quickly, "for we've saved Hank from hanging, and we'll not leave Bullion City without taking Sam Lane along with us."

As Liz Pray had shed no tears when she looked upon the dead body of her lover, so the fountain of her grief was not opened when she turned her eyes upon the white, inanimate countenance of her brother.

"Time we war gittin' thar," she said, grimly, as she relieved the person of one of the fallen miners of a revolver, "for thar's no tellin' what his cousin mout do when this yer doin's gits ter his ears."

"Lead the way to the house, Liz," said Jesse James, quietly, "and we'll follow."

The girl stooped to imprint a kiss on the cold forehead of her brother, and then ran through the store.

There was a rear door opening into an alley.

It was locked, and the key was gone, but Jesse James and Big John quickly smashed it down.

There were a few persons in the alley when the outlaws appeared, but at sight of them there was a quick scampering of feet.

The house occupied by Sam Lane's cousin was but a short distance away.

It was a large, square, frame building of two stories, and as Jesse James halted in front of it, the face of Sam Lane appeared at one of the upper windows.

Jesse James saw it, and sent a bullet through the glass.

A mocking laugh came back as answer to the shot.

Leaving Simon Hook and Liz Pray outside as guards, the outlaw chief with Big John and Cal Fiske rushed up the steps to the porch and tried the front door.

It was locked.

Jesse James lifted his foot, and gave the door a kick that made it rattle on its hinges.

As he did so, a bullet passed through the wooden panel and grazed his head.

"That's the cousin, I reckon," he grunted. "Let's return the compliment."

Three reports rang out at the same instant, eliciting a deep groan and a heavy fall from within.

"We've fetched him, sure," remarked Cal Fiske, his one eye twinkling in satisfaction, "an' now ter give ther door another rattle."

The three outlaws threw themselves against it with all their force.

Down went the obstacle to their entrance, and crack! crack! went a couple of bullets from the room within.

Jesse James was not hit, but one of the bullets struck Cal Fiske in the center of the forehead, producing instant death.

"Thar's only one galoot thar," cried Simon Hook to Liz Pray, as they stood at the foot of the steps, "an I reckon Jess and Cal kin attend ter his case 'thout any trouble. So if you'll jest keep an eye on ther front, I'll mosey 'round to ther back."

He was gone before the girl could open her lips in answer.

Looking toward the door, she saw Jesse James struggling with a tall man of powerful build, while Big John was engaged in a rough-and-tumble combat with something on the floor.

Hurrying forward, Liz Pray perceived that Big John's opponent was a large bulldog.

A bullet from her pistol speedily put an end to the brute's career.

Turning about after this demonstration to give her aid to Jesse James, her surprise was great to discover that neither of the combatants was in the room.

The tall man, whose name was Lew Adkins, and who was the cousin of Sam Lane, had torn himself from the clutches of his savage opponent, and had run into the kitchen.

Thither Jesse James had followed him.

A stairway led from the kitchen to the second story,

and Adkins was half-way up, when a bullet from the Missouri bandit's revolver sent him tumbling to the floor.

Crack! came a second shot, and the cousin of the detective gave one convulsive shudder and then ceased to breathe.

Jesse James was at the head of the stairs when Liz Pray reached the kitchen.

She resolved to follow him, and to be present at the capture or death of the man she so bitterly hated.

But when she arrived at the upper landing of the stairs, the door in front, through which Jesse James had passed, was shut in her face and then bolted.

In her rage and excitement she sent bullet after bullet through the door.

"Blaze away, Liz," said the taunting voice of an utter stranger, "and perhaps in time you may shoot a hole in the door big enough to crawl through."

"Who are you?" she cried, pantingly, as she proceeded to put fresh cartridges into her pistol, which happened to be of the same calibre as the one she had thrown away in the store.

"I am the boy who has got Jesse James dead to rights."

"You lie."

"Would you like to come in and see?"

"Yes."

As the bolt shot back, Liz Pray cocked her revolver.

But the surprise she met with when the door was opened prevented a use of the weapon.

A handful of ashes thrown into her face so blinded and discomposed her that she was not able to offer any resistance when a pair of strong arms grasped hers and dragged her into the room.

Her revolver was wrenched from her hand, and she was carried boldly and deposited upon a small, single bed, in a corner.

As she wiped the ashes from about her eyes, Liz Pray saw that two persons were regarding her with quiet satisfaction.

One was a medium-sized man of fifty or thereabouts, with a pock-marked face and sturdy build, and whom she recognized as one of the deputies of the sheriff, who had been pointed out to her by her brother once when she was visiting him at his cell in the county jail at Saguache.

The other was a tall and magnificently-formed woman of the blonde type of beauty, whose face expressed a masculine resolution and a high order of intelligence.

She was Sam Lane's affianced wife, and her home was at a cattle ranch some miles away, which she managed herself, her father and mother having died before she was fourteen.

She had several brothers, but her strong will and superior administrative faculties rendered her better capable of assuming charge of affairs than either of them.

As she bent her clear, searching eyes upon the rage-distorted face of the petite brunette on the bed, Liz Pray uttered one sentence into which all the venom of her nature was thrown.

"I hate you."

Lora Alleyn smiled, pityingly.

"I know why you're hyur, too," Liz went on, as she rose up on her pillow and glared at the blonde. "You're gone on Sam Lane, an' you dassent deny it, nuther."

Lora Alleyn blushed slightly, but her voice was steady when she replied:

"My private affairs can't possibly interest you, for we are strangers. Let us talk of your mission to this house."

"I've got nothin' ter say erbout that," said Liz Pray, snappishly.

"Very well, I can wait for the explanation, which will come when all of your companions are in jail."

"You'll never corral any o' them."

"Jesse James is already a prisoner, and"—looking out of the window—"there a dozen of my friends now on their way here, who will easily capture his associates."

Liz Pray turned her face to the wall.

Her thoughts were gloomy ones.

Her lover and her brother were dead, and she was a prisoner.

A groan from an adjoining apartment caused her to look around.

"Who's that?" she asked.

"Mr. Lane," answered the deputy sheriff. "He's pretty badly used up, and is in the next room."

Lora Alleyn, who had gone to her lover at the moment the groan was heard, presently returned.

She was about to say something, when the clatter of horses' hoofs without caused her to hasten to the window.

"My cowboys have come," she remarked, in some excitement, "and now for the round-up."

Liz Pray wondered what had become of Big John and her uncle.

She had heard no sounds from below since she had entered the upstairs room.

Two explanations for the state of affairs came to her mind.

One was that the two outlaws had met with some misfortune, the other that they had seen the approaching cowboys and had fled for their lives.

After mature consideration, she discarded the latter hypothesis.

"Tain't like them," she said to herself. "They wouldn't desert Jess that way. No, they've struck a snag down below, but what it is I can't guess."

A fusillade of shots turned her thoughts into a new channel.

The cowboys had met with a warm reception.

Liz Pray listened with all her ears, and her dark face glowed with a fierce joy when she heard the shouts and yells of the outlaws.

"Ye sed as how Jesse James war a prisoner," she exultingly cried, "an' yit thar he is down below a-gittin' in his work on your friends."

The deputy sheriff grinned.

"You're mistaken, Miss Spitfire," he said, quietly, "for Jesse James is in there."

He pointed toward the third door of the room, which was directly opposite to the one which opened into the front apartment, now occupied by the wounded detective.

The firing went on while this conversation was in progress.

Lora Alleyn from the window saw that the cowboys had withdrawn to the shelter of a group of trees about a hundred feet from the house, for the purpose of arranging for a new mode of attack.

They had come from the Alleyn ranch in response to a

telegram sent by their fair employer immediately upon her arrival in the town.

She had come to Bullion City that day on business, but before transacting it had stopped at the house of Sam Lane's cousin, in order to ascertain if any word had been received from him since he had started out, a week before, on his campaign against the Black Agents.

She arrived at the house a few minutes after Lew Adkins, the cousin, had brought the wounded detective from town in his cart.

Miss Alleyn had a private telegraphic wire from Bullion City to her ranch, with connections at Adkins' house and several other points on the way, and after her lover's wounds had been attended to, she sent off a dispatch requesting her foreman to get together as many of the cowboys as he could, and to ride like the wind to Bullion City.

The route which they traversed brought them to the rear of Adkins' house first, and they were fired upon when they came opposite the kitchen door.

The attack was so sudden and unexpected that they were thrown into confusion, and, with the loss of three of their number, they retreated to the grove of trees to devise a plan for routing the unseen enemies.

The foreman of the cowboys saw Lora Alleyn at the upstairs window.

By signs she gave him to understand that his cowboys had but two men to contend with.

He shook his head in such a positive manner that the fear seized her that the formidable Jesse James had indeed escaped from the room beyond her.

Turning from the deputy sheriff, whom she had summoned to the house for the purpose of protecting her lover, and who had remained upstairs at her urgent request, she asked him to look into the room where he had left the dreaded outlaw, and make sure that he was still there.

"Of course he's there," was the deputy's response. "The room has no window but the skylight, which he can't reach, and there isn't a hole anywhere by which even a mouse could get out."

"I'll give yer leave ter throw me out er that thar window," remarked Liz Pray, complacently, "if ye find Jess James whar yer put him. Shucks!" she contemptuously added, "thar ain't a shore enuff jail in Colorado thet kin hold him."

The deputy unlocked the door and entered the room, only to give utterance to an exclamation of surprise and dismay.

Jesse James was not there.

"What did I tell yer," jeered Liz Pray, who would have followed the deputy had not a pistol in the hands of Lora Alleyn made her retain her position on the bed. "Gone? 'Course he has, an' you was plumb crazy ter think he'd stay shet up in a old rattletrap like this here."

The outlaw chief had not remained a prisoner more than five minutes.

He had ascended the stairs and passed through the first room and on into the back apartment, the door of which was open.

The moment he entered the door was shut upon him quickly, and locked.

In the wardrobe of the room at the head of the stairs,

the deputy sheriff had concealed himself on hearing the outlaw's approach, and when he saw Jesse James hasten to the back room, he stole forward noiselessly and shut the dreaded enemy in, a prisoner.

Both the officer and Lora Alleyn thought they had cause to congratulate themselves upon the step thus taken by the former, for the back room was supposed to have no outlet.

Jesse James neither gnawed his teeth nor gave way to despair when he found himself caught in a trap, as it seemed.

"You think you've got me," he muttered, grimly, "and perhaps you have. But until I know for certain that this room isn't escape-proof, I am not ready to fold my arms and take the medicine you have fixed for me."

The skylight was small, but it shed sufficient light for him to see his surroundings clearly.

The room was unfurnished and bare. Above him were the rafters of the gable, and on the sides the beams had no covering.

High up on the wall of the gable end he saw something which gave him a gleam of hope.

It was a heavy beam, which projected several feet into the room, and was held firmly in place by a cross beam from rafter to rafter.

"This has been the loft of a barn," was his instant conclusion, "and that big beam must have its other end on the outside. It was put in for the purpose of raising hay from the ground."

In Missouri, where he had been raised, nearly every barn had a chute which ran from the loft to the manger in the stable.

He looked around for evidence that such a convenience had existed here, and speedily found it.

In one end were a number of short boards, one by six, covering a space about three feet square.

At the moment of his discovery, he heard the voice of Liz Pray in the room beyond, and knew that she had fallen into the hands of the party, or parties, who had caged him, while below, on the ground floor, the voices of Simon Hook and Big John in excited conversation came to his ears.

"There's a whole mob of them coming," he heard Big John say, "and we'll be in a devil of a boat, if Jesse James doesn't show up pretty soon."

"Suppose we go inside, and hunt him up," suggested Liz Pray's uncle.

"And leave such a bully place for the defense as this? No, no, 'twon't do, Simon. The time is too short, for these cowboys will be here in a minute."

Jesse James' first impulse was to shout and let his comrades know where he was, and solicit their help, but his common sense quickly told him that such a proceeding would be dangerous in the extreme, for the moment that he raised his voice the parties who had imprisoned him would rush in and shoot him down.

There was the possibility that he might prove more than a match for his foes, but he resolved not to resort to desperate measures until he had satisfied himself that he could not escape from the room in another way.

Whipping out his bowie knife, he began to cut and hack away at the boards which he believed had been nailed over the mouth of the chute.

As soon as he had made an aperture sufficient to admit his hand, he thrust it in, and, using all his great muscular strength, tore the board off.

In less than a minute the others were wrenched from their places.

He had been correct in his conjecture, for before him was the upper opening of the chute.

Without an instant's hesitation, he backed into the hole and let himself slide down.

The distance was but seven or eight feet, and he landed in the manger with a crash.

The click! click! of two revolvers in his near vicinity made him cry out quickly:

"Don't shoot. It's Jesse James."

Big John uttered an exclamation of delight, and, pulling open the small door of the chute, assisted his leader to the floor.

Jesse James saw that he was in what had once been the wide stall of a stable.

It was now used as a storeroom, and was at the extreme rear of the house.

Thither Simon Hook had gone, intending to enter the kitchen by that way, and thither Big John had followed him after he had seen Jesse James start for the rear by another route.

The three outlaws had no time for explanations, for the cowboys from the Alleyn ranch were now but a few rods away.

What followed the nearer approach of the force is known to the reader.

When the cowboys had retreated, Jesse James startled his companions by informing them that he had left his Winchester at the front door—it having been deemed too cumbersome for inside work—and that he intended to go and get it.

"There are twenty cowboys in that gang under the trees," Big John expostulated, "and you'll be within range of every rifle."

"I'm going through the house, not along the outside, John."

"Then you'll run the chance of getting plugged from behind a door."

"I'll shoot at every spot that might hold an enemy."

Refusing to allow either Big John or Simon Hook to accompany him, the bold and reckless outlaw passed from the stable storeroom into the kitchen.

He had no idea, when he started on his errand, that his escape from the room above had been discovered.

But the deputy sheriff had just left Jesse James' late place of imprisonment, and was descending the stairs, despite Lora Alleyn's remonstrances, when the outlaw chief opened the kitchen door.

Two pistols cracked at the same moment.

Jesse James' aim was the truer, and the brave officer tumbled down the stairs, where he lay motionless, with a bullet in his heart. The firing brought Sam Lane's sweetheart to the head of the stairs.

She gave one glance downward, saw what had happened, and then drawing the pistol which she always carried, fired at Jesse James' head.

The bullet reached its mark, and the man of many crimes staggered forward a few steps, and then sank slowly down beside the lifeless body of the deputy sheriff.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE OUTLAW'S WELCOME SURPRISE.

Lora Alleyn's shot was followed by a terrific fusillade from without.

The cowboys had rallied, half their force running on foot from the front of the house, the other half on horseback, and led by the foreman, charging on the enemy at the rear.

Big John and Simon Hook laid four of the assailing party low before either received a wound.

Suddenly Simon Hook uttered a deep groan, and, pressing his hand to his side, staggered to a heap of sacks, and fell over them.

"Hurt much, Simon?" asked his companion, without turning his head from the window, through which he had been firing in a stooping position, so as to keep his person concealed from view.

"I reckon I've got the soup put inter me fer good, John," was the faint response.

"I'm dern——" A bullet crashed through the woodwork, and made him stop short in his speech of condolence.

With a fierce oath, the stalwart outlaw raised his head, sighted a cowboy, and laid him low.

Then he dropped to the floor to escape the rain of bullets that followed.

"Good-by, John. Tell Liz ter look out fer herself an'——"

The voice of Simon Hook grew fainter, and his companion, casting one glance in his direction, saw the Missouri moonshiner slide from the pile of sacks to the floor.

"Dead," the last of the Black Agents muttered, "and I'll be dead, too, unless I hustle out of here mighty lively."

Big John crawled to the kitchen door, opened it a little, and looked in.

Lora Alleyn stood at the foot of the stairs with a pistol in her hand, looking down at the motionless and bloody form of Jesse James, while on the first landing above her was Liz Pray, whose attitude and expression reminded the onlooker of a tigress about to spring upon her victim.

She had not been bound, and when Lora Alleyn, who had been standing guard over her during the deputy sheriff's absence, became startled out of her ordinary caution by the shot fired by Jesse James in the kitchen, and hurried from the room without a thought of her prisoner, the opportunity came which the savage-minded brunette had been waiting for.

She leaped forward toward Lora, who, however, discovered her action in time to skip to one side, and Liz was precipitated to the foot of the stairs.

Quickly regaining her feet, she dashed across the room toward a stove at one side.

Big John's reappearance in the kitchen occurred simultaneously with the entrance of the last detachment of the cowboys.

Liz Pray was behind the stove, with an iron poker in her hand, waving it viciously in the face of one of her enemies, and the two doors of the room were guarded.

As the pistols of the cowboys and the reckless Black Agent cracked, a most surprising thing occurred.

Jesse James, who had been lying in the middle of the room, seemingly dead, suddenly rose up, and, knocking

down a brace of cowboys who stood between him and Big John, began an exhibition of pistol practice that speedily lessened the number of his foes.

The bullet from Lora Alleyn's pistol had not penetrated his skull, and he had simply been stunned by the shock as the mass of lead tore along his scalp and grazed the temporal bone.

He had revived while Big John was hurrying up the stairs to put an end to Sam Lane, and, perceiving that Lora Alleyn was not looking at him at the moment, he put his hand quickly to the breast-pocket of his coat and brought out a flask of whisky.

After taking a strong pull, he felt himself able, as he afterward expressed it, "to resume business at the old stand."

He partially closed his eyes, and remained motionless when the cowboys burst into the room, and only jumped to his feet when Big John was attacked by them.

With two revolvers in play, he managed to clear a passage to the door opening into the main apartment.

Big John, who had been wounded but slightly in the fight, followed close upon his heels.

A few scattering shots whizzed by them as they hurried toward the front door.

All the cowboys were now within the house, and the horses of some of them were tethered to trees a short distance away.

Jesse James and Big John secured mounts, and were in the road before Lora Alleyn's foreman, with half a dozen of his men, appeared at the rear of the house and opened fire.

Jesse James had secured his Winchester from under the porch, as he went out of the house, and he responded to the attack with a couple of telling shots.

Then he put spurs to the horse he had stolen, and with Big John went galloping away in the direction of the hills.

The cowboys gave a hot pursuit, but were unable to overtake the two outlaws.

Night found them in a place of safety.

Next morning both were so sore and weak from their wounds that they determined to remain where they were for twenty-four hours.

Jesse James had not seen Liz Pray when he made his successful fight for liberty in the kitchen of Lew Adkins' house, for the reason that when the bullets began to fly thick and fast the girl dropped behind the stove, and got out of harm's way.

But when the two outlaws reached their mountain retreat, and were resting after their long ride and exciting experiences, they discussed Liz Pray's case, and determined to attempt her rescue at the earliest possible moment.

Two days later they reached the cabin where Jesse James had left Frank James and the wounded Cole Younger.

No one was there but Frank James.

"I was thinking of starting out for Bullion City right away," he said, when his brother rode up, "for I'm feeling fine."

"Where's Cole?"

"Gone back to Missouri. He was pining to get back among his kin, and Dent started off with him yesterday."

Dent was the owner of the cabin, and a relative to Clell Miller.

Three days later Dent returned.

With him came Clell Miller and Jim Cummings.

CHAPTER IX.

TOOTHPICK JOE'S STRANGE PROPOSAL.

Two weeks later.

The discovery of new mines of unparalleled richness, so it was believed, at Bullion City, and the influx of hundreds of sports, adventurers, and gold-seekers, had given the majority of the old inhabitants something to think about besides the bloody raid of Jesse James and the Black Agents.

The saloons, dance-houses, and gambling hells were doing a "land-office" business, and money flowed in like water.

One evening a dispute arose in Dan Lason's joint between the dealer at a faro game and one of the players.

The latter, who happened to be Toothpick Joe, of whom the reader has had a previous acquaintance, saw the dealer make a peculiar motion, and he thereupon acted with the skill and promptitude that always characterized his actions in cases of desperate emergency.

His pistol was in his coat pocket, and he fired without withdrawing the weapon.

After the dead body of the dealer had been carried out, the game was resumed, a slenderly-built young man, with a light, silky mustache, and short, curly hair, of a hue that was a near approach to auburn, assuming the place of the dealer.

The proprietor of the game was acting as lookout, in a chair standing on a platform back of the layout.

The curly-headed gambler was a stranger to every one present, and had made his first appearance in the joint that evening.

With the remark, in a soft, musical voice, that he could fill the dead man's place, he had coolly seated himself without asking the proprietor's permission.

The latter, a tall, thin sport, with a cadaverous countenance, and a hacking cough, which gave evidence that he was far gone in consumption, merely smiled at the stranger's action.

But he kept a close eye on the stranger's movements after the game was resumed.

The card box had not been emptied before Dan Lason became satisfied that the new dealer thoroughly understood his business.

Had the game not been a square one, Lason might have interposed a decided objection to the stranger's assumption of a position that required not only knowledge of "brace" devices, but a skill and deftness in carrying them out calculated to deceive the average player.

One man looked at the youthful dealer long and intently.

Then he went into the barroom and had a few words with a man of resolute countenance, who was reading a paper at one of the tables.

"If Liz Pray has got a brother living, Casson," he said, in a low voice, "then he is in there helping the boys who are bucking the tiger."

"Hank was the only brother I ever heard of, Lane,"

replied the man at the table. "Still," he added, "she may have half a dozen brothers, for the family lived here but a short time, and the old woman was mighty close-mouthed about her affairs."

"Step in and take a look at the fellow, and tell me how he strikes you."

The sheriff arose from his seat and walked to the open door of the faro room.

The dealer started slightly when he glanced at the face of the officer, and then he gave his whole attention to the cards.

Casson remained in the doorway for a few moments, and then beckoned to Toothpick Joe.

The little sport came over to the sheriff and held out his hands with a light laugh.

"Want to arrest me, I suppose."

"I'll have to, Joe, but I reckon the inquest will exonerate you."

"Let me play a while longer, won't you?"

"Go ahead."

The sheriff returned to the barroom and took the detective into a corner.

Sam Lane had nearly recovered from his wounds, though he was not capable of much exertion.

He was lying in an unconscious condition at the head of the stairs when Lora Alleyn found him at the conclusion of the savage fight in the kitchen of her cousin's house between the cowboys and the two outlaws, Jesse James and Big John.

The cattle queen, as she was known in Saguache County, did not once think of Liz Pray while she was bandaging her lover's wounds anew, and assisting him to his room.

It was only when she went down again to the kitchen that she remembered the reckless and vengeful brunette.

She was not in the kitchen, however, nor did a close search in every portion of the building reveal her presence.

The cowboys who had escaped the fire of the outlaws had rushed out of doors when Jesse James and Big John had left the house, without remembering that Liz Pray was hidden behind the stove.

When they had gone, and while Lora Alleyn was occupied with Sam Lane upstairs, Liz had stolen out the back way, and, unperceived by the cowboys, whose whole attention was then engrossed with the escaping outlaws, had glided to the shelter of the trees a short distance away, and from thence to the bank of a small stream, where there was a dense undergrowth.

A rapid run of a few minutes brought her in sight of a horse, saddled and bridled, which was cropping the grass near the river bank.

It was the property of one of the dead cowboys, and had broken from its fastenings while the fight was going on in the house.

Mounting it, Liz Pray rode swiftly away from the purlieu of Bullion City, only drawing rein when she reached a narrow trail which led deep into the heart of the mountains.

Since her flight nothing had been heard of her, and Sheriff Casson, when he was able to get about after his injury received at the courthouse, expressed the opinion that she had gone to Denver to rejoin her mother.

It was after midnight before the curly-headed dealer came from his seat.

"I reckon I'll quit," he said to Dan Lason. "My deal has managed to clean out most of the boys, an' I've won a few cartwheels myself."

He tapped his pocket lightly as he spoke.

"Have a nightcap before you leave?" said Lason, politely.

"Don't keer if I do."

They walked up to the bar counter and the dealer handed off a glass of whisky with the ease and satisfaction of a veteran guzzler.

He was about to leave the bar, when a sudden thought struck him.

"I'll shake you for a twenty," he said to Dan Lason.

"Shake goes. Put out the daps, barkeep."

The dicebox was produced, and the curly-headed dealer, after covering the faro proprietor's double eagle, took the box a light shake and threw out the dice.

It was a poker play, and the throw showed three sixes and a pair of fives.

"Better bob," suggested Lason, with professional instinct.

"No, I'll shake to ther sixes, old son. Never had no 'o' luck a-bobbin'."

"Liz Pray, for a thousand dollars," whispered Casson Lane, in a corner. "She has disguised her voice fairly, but not enough to pull the wool over my eyes."

"It's Liz, sure," replied the detective, with positive-

ness. The person of whom they were speaking now made her hand throw.

An exclamation of surprise burst from Dan Lason's

mouth. "By the great horn spoon! Two more sixes!"

"Which makes five altogether," quietly responded the dealer, "an' if you kin tie an invincible like that I'll bet ther crowd, an' chuck in er twenty fer ther benefit of her church."

Then Lason shook his head.

"He might try a thousand years and never do it," he

thought. The stranger had gathered up the dice for the ostensible purpose of putting them in the box again, when Lason, whose eyes had been regarding the little ivory cubes in a curious manner, suddenly reached out and grasped his hand.

"Drop 'em!" he said, in a stern, menacing manner.

The stranger drew back his other hand to draw a pistol, when it was seized by Sam Lane, who had come up exactly the moment he witnessed the faro proprietor's consternation.

"Curse you both," hissed the youth, "for a pair of

easy now," counseled the detective, "for you may be coming in a different key in a few minutes."

"How dare you insult a gentleman in this beastly fashion," the stranger retorted. "Do yer think I've been beaten?"

Then Lason, to whom the remark seemed to be especially pressed, made no answer, but he roughly twisted the arm he held until he of the curly locks uttered a cry of

At the same instant the fingers which had clasped the dice relaxed, and the cubes dropped to the counter.

Lason took them up one by one, and examined them critically.

"Every side shows a six," he said, with ominous calmness. "That's worse than loaded dice. You rung them in on me pretty slick, mister, but you won't get away with the snap all the same."

The stranger tried to wrench himself from the grasp of the two men who held him, but in vain.

His wrists were held with an iron grip.

"What's yer programme?" he sneered, though his face was very pale. "Goin' ter put a bullet or a knife inter me?"

"No," said Dan Lason, slowly, "but I'm goin' ter call in ther boys and ask 'em to assist me while I strip off them dandy clothes you've got on and treat you to a coat of tar and feathers. When that's done, we'll rout out the brass band and ride you out of town on a rail."

The stranger uttered a cry that was instinct with mortal terror, while his slight form trembled like an aspen.

"I don't think you'll carry out your plan, Dan," said Sam Lane, quietly.

"Why not?" demanded the gambler, in surprise.

"Because the cheat is a woman."

"Holy smoke! You don't say?" ejaculated Lason.

"He speaks ther frozen truth," rejoined Liz Pray, for the stranger was she, and she bowed her head upon her breast.

"And she is the sister of Hank Pray," added Sheriff Casson, who had come up to the counter a moment before.

The girl shot the officer one glance charged with contempt and defiance, and then gave utterance to a peculiar yell.

Sam Lane had heard it before, and knew that it was the danger-call of the Black Agents.

Swinging Liz Pray around so that her person was in front of him, he turned his face to the door and drew his pistol.

Six masked men rushed in an instant later.

"Hands up, everybody!" the leader called out, sharply, "or we'll convert this sheebang into a morgue in a holy minute."

Sam Lane let drive with his revolver, but Liz Pray struck his arm the moment he pulled the trigger, and the bullet struck the ceiling instead of finding an enemy's heart.

The leader of the masked men, who was Jesse James, leaped upon the detective before he could fire a second time.

Dan Lason looked down the muzzle of Frank James' pistol, and, like a prudent man, held up his hands.

Sheriff Casson, in whose vocabulary the word fear had no place, got one shot, and that penetrated the brain of Lem Dent, and thus reduced the force of outlaws to five.

As the desperado fell, the pistols of Big John, Clell Miller, and Jim Cummings cracked, with the brave sheriff as a target, and the vindictive trio did not turn their attention to other objects until Casson's body had been riddled with bullets.

Then the fight began, the gamblers in the faro-room made a rush for the door, but on seeing the masked men,

and guessing that a raid for the purposes of robbery was in progress, hastily withdrew their persons from view, and closed and locked the door.

There had been no firing after the death of Sheriff Casson, and the gamblers wondered what the masked desperadoes were doing.

The keyhole afforded them no view of the present occupants of the barroom, for the door was in a corner ten feet or more from a line with the counter.

The work that Jesse James and his men were engaged in consisted in binding Sam Lane, the detective, and Dan Lason, the faro game proprietor, with stout cords.

Liz Pray, in her disguise as the curly-headed sport, regarded the operation with fierce satisfaction.

Suddenly the head of Toothpick Joe showed itself above the six-foot partition that separated the faro-room from the saloon.

He and his companions were cornered, in case the bandits took it into their heads to make a raid on them, for the faro-room had no window, and only one door—that which opened into the saloon.

It was partially ventilated by means of the open space between the top of the partition and the ceiling.

The little sport caught the eye of one of the fifteen Bullionites who had been forced to enter the saloon, and made a number of quick, nervous gestures, implying that he and his companions should not tamely submit to the demands of the masked robbers.

The Bullionite, who was a hotel keeper, named Jamison, shook his head.

Jesse James noticed the motion, and, glancing toward the faro-room, noticed Toothpick Joe's scowling face.

Crack! went his revolver, and down dropped the little sport, with a hole in his ear.

"I could have killed you, Joe," shouted the outlaw chief, who had learned the sport's name after the fight for the rescue of Hank Pray, "and I will yet, if you don't mind your p's and q's."

"Rats!" sang out Toothpick Joe, in scornful defiance. Jesse James bit his lips and frowned.

Then he said, in his quiet, determined way:

"Joe, I reckon I'll have to ask you to come out here."

"Can't, Jesse. The boys in here need me. They're not weaned yet, and I've got to give 'em a little gruel, presently."

This contemptuous allusion to the neutral attitude of the gamblers who were with him, awoke a chorus of remonstrances and objurgations.

Some of his companions were in favor of rushing into the saloon and showing the mettle that was in them; others advised that Toothpick Joe be shoved out of the room and forced to make a lone-handstand against the bandits.

Jesse James smiled while the wordy altercation was going on.

All this time Frank James, Jim Cummings, Clell Miller and Big John were engaged in relieving the Bullionite of their weapons and spare cash.

"Better come out, Joe," called the outlaw chief, coaxingly, "for you'll find better company in the barroom."

"To blaze with your company."

"I've got a bone to pick with you."

"Come in here and I'll shove it into your craw," replied the enraged sport.

"Do you mean it?"

"That's what, Jesse."

Jesse James looked at Frank, as if asking for his advice.

Frank shook his head.

"The mob in there would jump on you the moment you entered the door," he said, in a whisper.

"I'll fix that, Frank."

Then, raising his voice, he said:

"I'll come in, Joe, if your friends will pass their word not to interfere between us."

"We'll promise," exclaimed the gamblers, with one voice.

They saw sport ahead, and the gaming instinct induced them to accept Jesse James' terms.

As the bold outlaw removed his mask and advanced, Toothpick Joe opened the door.

"Hands down, sonny, until we come to an agreement," said Jesse James, sternly, as he saw that the sport's right hand was behind his back.

"Don't be afraid," sneered Toothpick Joe, "I was only taking ordinary precautions against a surprise."

When the door was again closed, Frank James stepped softly up to it with an anxious look on his face.

It was now past one o'clock in the morning, and after Jim Cummings had locked the street door, put up the shutters, and turned down the lamps, a passerby would have imagined that the place was closed for the night.

Backed against the wall were the fifteen Bullionites with Clell Miller and Big John standing guard over them while on the floor, in a corner by the bar, Sam Lane and Dan Lason lay, bound hand and foot, and with Liz Pray sitting beside them to keep them company.

"Well," said Jesse James, in cool inquiry, when he found himself in the faro-room, "what have you to propose, Joe?"

"A game that even you will lack the nerve to engage in."

"Bah!"

"It will mean your life or mine."

Jesse James shrugged his shoulders.

"State it," he said, with a frown, "and quit this beating."

at the bush. Time is money with me to-night, for I settle your hash, I've an engagement a short distance from town, which I wouldn't go back on for the old."

"I propose, then," responded Toothpick Joe, gravely, "play you a game at faro—one deal of fifty-two cards, to deal and I keep cases, or *vice versa*, as you may prefer. We will start with a stake, say of one hundred dollars, and the man who shows the most bullion at the end of the game shall be considered the winner."

Toothpick Joe paused and looked steadily into the eyes of the reckless bandit.

"Anything more, Joe?" queried Jesse James, nonchalantly.

"Yes; there will be two stakes. One is money, and the other—"

"Ah, yes, the other, Joe. What is it?"

"Will be a human life."

"That's what I supposed. The man who wins the game does the killing, eh?"

"That's it?"

"Then, Mr. Toothpick Joe, sport and dare-devil, prepare to be killed."

CHAPTER X.

TOOTHPICK JOE'S BACK-DOWN.

The sports who had elected to become spectators of the game gathered about the table with eager countenances, and the contestants took their seats.

Toothpick Joe was given his choice of places.

"When I'll deal," he said, "and we'll start with a new deal."

"Here it is," responded Jesse James, quietly, and, drawing an unopened pack of cards from his pocket, threw it over to his opponent.

Toothpick Joe, with difficulty, suppressed an oath.

"He had counted on using a marked deck of his own."

"But he swallowed his wrath and disappointment with good indifference."

"That's all right."

"Breaking the covering, he took out the cards and run them over rapidly."

"An expert in detecting fraud as well as practicing it, he soon became convinced that the deck in his hands was an honest one."

"The game commenced, each man selecting the representative of a card on the table and placing a ten-dollar stake upon it."

"Jesse James chose the knave for a beginner."

"Toothpick Joe pinned his faith and his coin to the king."

"The dealing opened, and the second card that came out of the box was the knave."

The little sport, with a quiet smile, reached over and gathered in the outlaw's gold piece.

"First blood for yours truly," he remarked, with a chuckle of satisfaction.

"Don't crow, sonny," said Jesse James, slowly, and with a glance out of his cold, blue eyes that would have made a less nervy sport than Toothpick Joe shiver and turn pale, "for I may get the first knock-down."

"I'll come up smiling for the next rattle, if you do," was the quick response.

The game proceeded, and a dozen cards were slipped without a change of standing.

Outside, in the barroom, Jim Cummings was enacting a rôle that appeared to suit him admirably.

He was behind the bar, sampling the different bottles of liquor, and giving his opinion of each brand after he had tasted it."

"This hyer," said he, to Clell Miller, "is what useter be called sheep herder's delight. Nowadays we give it ther name of tarant'ler juice. A man kin throw hisself outside o' four fingers of it, and be primed fer a month's jag."

"I tackled suthin' like it in a little town in Calloway County, Missoura, last year. Afore I wet my whistle I didn't have no sorter interest in a reel estate or pe-cooneary way in the place. But when I'd swallered that lickin', Clell, I thought I owned ther whole town, an' thet ther people in it was my slaves. Great snakes an' little tadpoles, but didn't I jest cut around fer keeps. This yer 'sperience happened me on a Sunday. Three weeks later I was arrested down in Santa Fe, New Mexico, fer bein' drunk an' disturbin' somebody's peace."

He paused to bite off a big chew of tobacco from a plug of "nigger head."

"Well," said Clell Miller, "what has your Santa Fe racket got to do with the liquor you drank in Missouri?"

"I never teched another drop of ther stuff endurin' ther hull six weeks."

"Do you mean to say, Jim, that——"

"Thet I war pulled up fer ther same old Calloway County drunk? I do, Clell, fer a fact."

Cummings winked at Frank James, and then spat out his tobacco, and took a strong pull out of a bottle he found under the counter.

It appeared to suit his wants, for he passed it to Miller, who, in turn, handed it to Big John.

Frank James declined to drink.

He was intensely interested in the game going on inside the faro-room, and still kept his station at the door.

Fifteen minutes after Toothpick Joe began to slip out the cards the game was at the last turn.

Jesse James' one hundred dollars, the limit of capital, was reduced to twenty.

Four cards remained uncovered in the box.

When the forty-sixth card had come uppermost, the last "wrinkle" in a two-handed game was exhibited.

The forty-sixth card was thrown upon the pile of winners, and with it went the forty-seventh.

This left the forty-eighth as the last single winner, with four cards remaining uncovered in the box.

To guess the sequence of the first three was to "call the turn" by the new method.

The four cards left were the ace of diamonds, the king of spades, the knave of clubs, and the four of hearts.

The winner in this phase of the game, in ordinary cases, where but three cards remain in the box, would have been paid in the ratio of four to one.

But in this two-handed game, often played in the West, where each player assumed the rôle of banker as well as gambler, he who "called the turn" won ten times the amount of his bet.

Not a muscle of Jesse James' face moved, as he planked down his money and made his call:

"Jack, king, four."

He had one chance in twenty-four of winning, but if he won, the game would be his, for the payment of the bet would require the production by Toothpick Joe of two hundred dollars, which exceeded his capital by twenty dollars.

On the other hand, to lose meant the surrender of his life.

The king of outlaws had done many foolhardy things in his life upon the reckless impulse of the moment, but it seemed to Frank James, listening without, that he had never rashly invited such terrible consequences before.

After making his selection of sequence, Jesse James looked at his opponent expectantly.

Toothpick Joe leaned back in his chair and grinned at the outlaw.

"I won't bet," he said, carelessly. "Why should I? I'm ahead, and by getting in on the turn I might lose what I have won. No, no, Jesse, I'll just naturally stay out and let you monkey with the twenty-four chances in the box."

"Slip out the cards," returned the outlaw, coldly. "You're not the thoroughbred I'd put you up to be."

Toothpick Joe's face flushed at this taunt, but he made no reply.

The top card—the last winner—was thrown out, and the first of the cards left was disclosed to view.

It was the knave of clubs.

Jesse James coolly stroked his chin, but never lifted his eyes from the table.

Toothpick Joe slipped the knave out rather nervously, and exhibited the second card.

An expression of uneasiness showed itself in his face when he saw that it was the king of spades.

Jesse James' countenance was immovable.

If he felt any elation at the sight of the second card which agreed with his sequence, he gave no outward indication of it.

Toothpick Joe placed both hands over the top of the box and drew a deep breath.

The last card of the sequence of three lay below the king, and the sight of it would determine his fate.

Luck had singularly favored his opponent thus far. Might it not continue, and give him the victory?

But the third card was not shown, for Toothpick Joe whipped out a pistol, and fired at Jesse James' head.

Quick as the action was, it was not as quick as that of his adversary.

Two reports rang out, with almost deafening detonation.

When the smoke cleared away, Jesse James rose unharmed, but Toothpick Joe lay back in his chair, still dead.

The gambler spectators uttered not a word, for to their minds the little sport had deserved the fate which had suddenly overtaken him.

As Frank James burst in the door, his brother reached over, picked up the tin box, and threw out the third card.

It was the ace of diamonds.

Toothpick Joe would have won the game, and Jesse James would have been at his mercy, had he finished the deal.

CHAPTER XI.

THE BLACK AGENTS ON DECK AGAIN.

"Boys," said Jesse James to the gamblers, who witnessed the shooting of Toothpick Joe in the parlour of Dan Lason's joint, "you have behaved so properly this evening that I hate to put you to any further inconvenience; but as I have some further business to transact in Bullion City to-night, I shall be compelled to keep you here an hour or so longer."

One of the gamblers was about to speak, when the outlaw put up his hand and quietly continued.

"But you shan't be made to stay here and suck your thumbs while I am gone. Jim"—calling to Cummins who was at the door—"bring in a couple of bottles of whisky and some glasses."

The long-legged bandit quickly complied with this request.

"I will not ask you to pungle your weapons, gentlemen," was the last words of Jesse James before he

room, "if you will all pledge me your word that you not attempt to use them while I am away."

The promise was given, and then the outlaw chief went to the barroom and addressed the fifteen Bullionites, who were standing like silent statues against the wall.

"In an hour, at furthest," he said, with the easy concession of a man who has the game in his own hands, "I am disposed to be patronizing, 'I will open the front door and set you free. In the meantime, you have my permission to squat, if you find your present position some.'"

Frank James accompanied him to the door.

"Be extra cautious, Jesse," he said, earnestly, "and, if you don't find him in, let the business slide. Some other fellow will do."

"Have no fears, Frank."

"He's a tough customer, Jesse."

"I know it, and I rather enjoy the prospect of having to do with him."

Up the street went the bold outlaw.

He was starting out to make a call on Dick Waldo, marshal of Bullion City.

Waldo had a magnificent jeweled revolver which formerly belonged to Jesse James, and it was this highly prized weapon that the outlaw was after.

As the door closed behind Jesse James, Jim Cummings came to the bar, to carry the two bottles of whisky into the barroom, for the benefit of the temporarily imprisoned guests. Liz concluded to sample some of Dan Lason's whisky for herself.

She secured a bottle of whisky, and was soon maudlin. Approaching Sam Lane, she dashed the bottle to the floor, and shook her fist in his face.

"I swore ter kill ye, Sam Lane," she hissed, "fer whut ye done ter me, an', as I've got yer in a sho' nuff tight grip, I reckon I'll put ther everlastin' kibosh onter yer now."

A dagger came out of the bosom of her gown, and if it had been buried in the detective's heart had not Big John interfered.

"I allowed him to take the weapon from her hand, and then she surprised him by throwing herself into his arms and bursting into a flood of tears.

"Wallers liked ye, John," she cried, as she hugged him tightly, "an' now 'at Jeemes Starlight is gone, I dunno where ter lay my head, but on your broad'n manly buzz."

"Take another drink, Liz," remarked Clell Miller, with a wink at Frank James, "and you'll be ready to do your duty."

The girl straightened up instantly, and then, seizing a glass from the counter, flung it at the joker's head.

Miller dodged, and the glass struck the wall, and was shattered in pieces.

A tantalizing laugh from the man she had attacked caused her to start for him with hands outstretched and in a violent rage.

Miller retreated to the farthest corner, and Big John followed close behind the irate Liz.

All eyes were for the moment turned upon the participants in this amusing scene.

Clell Miller held up his hands, when he reached the corner, and looked at Liz in mock supplication.

But before the irate woman reached him, her anger had cooled somewhat, and extending her hand to Clell Miller, she said, with a timidity that was in strange contrast with her ordinary demeanor:

"Won't yer shake, Clell?"

Miller took her hand quickly, and gave it a warm pressure.

Liz drew a breath of relief and satisfaction.

"Now," she said, soberly, "I'll mosey back to Sam Lane."

She reached the end of the counter, only to utter a scream of surprise and dismay.

The detective and Dan Lason were gone.

Frank James was the first to solve the mystery of their disappearance.

On the floor, a few feet from the spot where the prisoners had been placed, were several pieces of broken glass, one of which Sam Lane had secured, and he had succeeded, without attracting her attention, in releasing his wrists by cutting the cords with the broken glass, a few minutes before she left the stool to throw herself into Big John's arms.

The moment that she made a rush for Clell Miller, and became the sole object of the attention of the bandits, Lane slipped his hands out and quickly released Dan Lason.

Both were unarmed, but each resolved to make a desperate fight for life and liberty.

Liz Pray was occupied with Clell Miller in the corner, when Lason gave the detective a sharp nudge in the ribs.

"We're all right, Sam," he whispered, "if they don't turn their eyes this way for a minute."

As he spoke he arose to his hands and knees and began to crawl for a trapdoor only two or three feet from him, which concealed an opening in the cellar where Lason stored his liquors.

Lane followed him, and they were soon in the cellar, with their absence undiscovered.

At the rear of the underground storeroom was a large double door, which opened into a vacant lot, through which were driven the trucks containing the consign-

ments of liquor that had arrived at the nearest railway station.

By the time Frank James reached the basement, Lane and his companion were in the lot, and were speeding to safety.

In the meantime, Jesse James was having the most exciting kind of a time.

He was greeted with a surprise at the first cross street above the saloon.

Half a dozen men, concealed in the shadow of a large building, suddenly sprang out in front of him, and commanded him to throw up his hands.

Dan Lason was at their head, and the men were sports and miners whom he had found at the nearest hotel.

"Throw up nothing!" he exclaimed, in a deep, hoarse voice. "I am no nighthawk, I'd have you know."

Bullion City had not yet attained to the luxury of gas or electric light lamps, and the naphtha substitutes, placed at alternate corners, gave but a poor illumination.

Jesse James' face could not be seen by the men in his front, and for a moment they stood irresolute.

Then some one cried:

"We're on the wrong track. There they are now."

He pointed down the cross street.

Jesse James looked, and saw a number of dark forms hurrying in his direction.

They were Frank James and his five companions.

"If you're huntin' robbers," cried the outlaw chief, in his assumed voice, "then count me in."

No one answered, and as Dan Lason's back was turned toward him, he sprang to the sport's side, tripped him up, knocked a couple of the robber-hunters down, and then announced his presence to the approaching outlaws in these ringing words:

"I'm here, boys, and all safe and sound. Give them a rattle, quick."

Crack! went the pistols, and down went three of Dan Lason's force.

Before the others could rally, Jesse James and his men were running swiftly toward the point in the outskirts where they had left their horses.

Mounting them, they rode rapidly out of town.

They had put a couple of miles between themselves and Bullion City, when Jesse James turned around to speak to Frank.

He was not with the party.

Frank James had not ridden by his brother's side, as usual, but had taken the rear, giving as an excuse that his horse was not in good condition.

Clell Miller, who had been next in front of Frank, was as much surprised at his absence as Jesse James himself.

"I'll tell you what I think," he said, when the outlaws had reined in their horses. "Frank was wounded in the

last scrimmage, and he rode behind because he didn't want to alarm you, Jesse, and make us all slow down to his gait."

"Then we'll find him behind, somewhere," said the outlaw law chief, quickly.

They turned their horses' heads, and rode back toward Bullion City.

Morning broke upon them when they had ridden the distance to town.

Then they saw a large body of men gathered around some object in the road.

"Frank!" exclaimed Jesse James, in a choking voice, "and he is wounded and a prisoner."

A nearer approach showed over twenty gleaming rifles.

Jesse James was about to order a charge, which might have resulted in the destruction of himself and every member of his band, when one of the party of armed men came riding toward the outlaws, waving a white handkerchief.

As he drew nearer, Jesse James recognized him as Dick Waldo, the plucky marshal of Bullion City.

"I've got a message for you," he said, when he had arrived within speaking distance.

Jesse James, with a puzzled countenance, rode forward to receive it.

Waldo produced a torn piece of brown wrapping paper.

Upon it were these words, written in blood, but with a firm hand:

JESSE—Don't try to rescue me, for we'll both go under if you do. My wound is not dangerous, and there are more ways than one to kill a cat.

The nine concluding words of the note were unsigned.

"I was a fool to promise him to deliver this," Waldo growled, "but having made the promise, I was bound to keep it."

"I am obliged to you, Dick," replied Jesse James earnestly.

"Don't mention it."

"Tell Frank I will do as he says, but that I shan't get him."

"All right. It's a pity none of my posse are mounted," said the marshal, as he rode off, "or we'd make a mighty warm fire for you fellows."

"I may give you a chance, after a while, to do some warming."

"I hope you will. Good-by, Jesse."

"Ta, ta, Dick."

* * * * *

A week after the events last narrated the new appointed successor of Sheriff Casson, who was Dick Waldo, was visited by a Kansas officer, who held a

tion for the transfer of Frank James to Topeka, there be tried for a robbery committed on Kansas territory, some months before.

After the usual formalities in such cases had been gone rough with; Frank James, now partially recovered from his wound, was placed on board a train of a branch of the Denver and Rio Grande at McGinty.

Sam Lane had been deputized to assist the officer from Kansas in transporting the outlaw to Topeka.

The same train that bore them on their journey carried eighty thousand dollars in silver bullion, the product of the mines of Saguache County.

While passing through a cañon of the Sierra Blanca, a few miles from Los Huecos, a man sprang suddenly from the bushes to the track, a few hundred yards in front of the engine, and began waving his hands wildly.

The engineer, who supposed there was an obstruction on the track, and that the man had discovered it, instantly reversed and whistled for down brakes.

The train came to a standstill within a few feet of the person who had given the warning.

The wheels of the engine had no sooner ceased to revolve than a dozen armed men, with Jesse James at their head, sprang from their place of concealment in the bushes.

They were the Black Agents of Saguache, reorganized, and upon the face of each man was an expression of desperate determination.

CHAPTER XII.

JESSE JAMES' TEN-STRIKE.

The train that left McGinty with Frank James and his custodian was made up of two passenger coaches, an express car, and a combination baggage and mail car.

The messenger for the express was a young man, named Weston, who had been promoted to the position but two weeks before.

He was affable, good-natured, and, as the result proved, easily imposed upon.

While the engineer was waiting for the signal to start, a dudsly attired man, of thirty or thereabouts, passed Weston, who was standing in the doorway of his car, caught his eye, smiled, bowed, and then hurried to the ticket window of the station.

The messenger had never seen the man before, and his curiosity regarding his identity caused him to keep an eye on him.

The stranger did not appear to notice that he was the object of Weston's scrutiny, though his face wore a peculiar smile when he put down the money for his ticket.

This transaction over, he became engaged in low and earnest conversation with the agent.

Suddenly he extended his hand through the window, and exclaimed, loud enough for everybody to hear:

"Well, Sessions, I am glad to have met you, and I won't fail to carry that message to your brother."

The express messenger now became exceedingly anxious to learn who the dudsly attired stranger was, for Gorge Sessions, the agent's brother, lived at Miles Grove, a station farther on, and was one of his most cherished friends.

His satisfaction, therefore, may be imagined, when the stranger ascended to the platform of the express compartment and knocked at the door.

Weston came forward quickly, and opened it.

"I want to ride with you for a piece," said the dude. "I'm a messenger, myself, working on the Pacific branch for Wells, Fargo & Co., and now enjoying a lay-off."

This explanation, given with easy assurance, caused Weston to admit him instantly.

"If you are a friend of George Sessions, you are doubly welcome," said the messenger.

The train started up as the dude gave his answer.

"I have known George ever since he was knee-high to a chair leg."

"Indeed," said the pleased Weston; "then I am happy to know you."

"Allow me to introduce myself. My name is Martin—Clifford Martin. You must have heard of me, if you know any of the boys from the coast."

Weston was forced to admit that he was acquainted with but two of the Pacific messengers.

"I am from the East," he explained, "and this is my second week in the West."

"It's a lucky thing for me that you are a new-comer," thought the dude.

But what he said was this:

"You don't have much excitement where you come from."

"No; everything runs smoothly, Mr. Martin."

"Out here, though, it is different. Train robberies and similar devilment every week."

"This branch has never been bothered, I am told," rejoined the messenger.

"Perhaps the reason is that it never carries a large amount of money."

"That's where you're wrong. We express more than any section of the Denver & Rio Grande in Colorado."

Weston was about to add that he now carried in the car eighty thousand dollars in Saguache bullion, but, on second thought, he concluded that his position as custodian of this wealth did not warrant him in revealing its presence even to another express messenger, and a friend of Gorge Sessions.

The dude smoked a cigar and watched Weston at his

work with the waybills and checking, until the little mountain station of Los Huecos was passed.

Then he threw away his cigar, and his pleasant expression gave place to one of stern resolution.

Weston, who was busy at his desk for some moments after the station had been passed, did not notice the change.

He little dreamed that the man who had wormed himself into his confidence was Clell Miller, one of the most cunning and desperate members of Jesse James' Black Agents.

Miller, in pursuance of instructions from his chief, had assumed the rôle of the Pacific Coast messenger with the dudish airs, after having been posted in regard to the family history of Sessions, the station agent at McGinty.

His long, earnest conversation at the ticket window had been in relation to Sessions' brother George.

"I know him well," Miller had warmly asserted, "and a better-hearted boy never breathed, and when I get to Miles Grove I am going to put in a week with him."

"Tell him he is an uncle," returned the unsuspicious agent, "and that the little fellow—it's a boy—weighs twelve pounds, and is a buster."

Miller's answer, delivered for the benefit of Weston, has already been given.

The time for the disguised outlaw's performance of the most important branch of the duty assigned him occurred when the train began to slow down.

Miller knew what this meant, and as Weston, the messenger, turned from his desk in surprise, he found himself looking down the barrel of a six-shooter.

"Hands up!" was the command, not uttered in the mel-low, persuasive voice of a few moments before, but in the harsh, insistent tone of the merciless desperado.

The messenger, with a gasping cry, "Why, why, what's this?" raised his hands, tremblingly.

"Now come here, quick."

Weston, approached, his countenance the picture of fear.

Miller seized him roughly and flung him to the floor.

The surprised Easterner was bound and gagged by the time the train came to a standstill.

The bullion from the Saguache mines was in a heavy, iron-bound box in a corner.

Miller knew that the messenger did not have the key to the lock, for it had been sent on to its destination by a private messenger the day before.

But he was provided with the tools required for breaking the box open.

He was engaged in this work when the attack of Jesse James and the Black Agents outside was begun.

Three of the band, with Big John in command, took

possession of the locomotive, quickly overpowering the engineer and fireman.

The other Black Agents, acting upon the plan adopted by Jesse James, scattered to different parts of the train.

In the forward passenger car were Frank James, Sam Lane, and the Kansas officer.

The former was handcuffed to the latter.

Sam Lane had risen from his seat when the train stopped, in order to go forward to ascertain what had occurred.

He had not reached the door before it was thrown open and Jesse James and Jim Cummings entered.

At the same moment Liz Pray, attired in a male costume, and Lum Escott, an Arizona desperado of heroic proportions, who had joined the gang a week before, made their appearance at the other door.

The detective was thus placed between two fires.

"Curse you, take that!" hissed Jesse James, and "thunder!" cried Jim Cummings.

Both fired at the same instant, and, before Sam Lane had time to blaze away with his own weapon, four bullets in all had been discharged.

To the amazement of the two outlaws, the man they had marked out for instant death did not fall.

Each bullet had been aimed at his heart.

A shirt of mail, purchased after his dangerous experiences at Bullion City, had rendered the fire of his enemies ineffective.

His own revolver came into play as they were about to spring upon him, and it pumped lead until every chamber was empty.

Behind him, Liz Pray and Escott were pressing forward, neither daring to fire lest their bullets should find a friend instead of the hated enemy.

The vengeful brunette was within a few feet of Lane when Jim Cummings fell over a seat, desperately wounded, and Jesse James and the detective became engaged in a hand-to-hand struggle.

Her eyes were blazing with murderous ferocity as she drew a dagger from her bosom, and prepared to drive it into Sam Lane's heart.

"No, you don't, you little fiend," hissed a voice behind her, and the Kansas officer, who had disengaged himself from the handcuffs, fired over Lum Escott's head, and sent a bullet crashing through her brain.

One sharp cry, and she fell back in the arms of Escott, dead.

The Kansas officer proceeded to follow up his advantage, and was about to send the Arizona desperado to a warmer clime than this, when Frank James, who had risen from his seat the moment his custodian left him, brought his manacled hands down on the officer's head with crushing force.

As he sank to the floor, Frank James leaped upon him, and, with the steel bracelets, quickly beat him into insensibility.

Then he searched for the key to the handcuffs, found it, and stood up in the aisle, a free man, just at the moment that the baggage master, who had successfully run the gantlet of half a score of Black Agents, was coming in the door.

The few passengers in the car had, as yet, made no attempt to oppose the outlaws.

But when Jesse James and Sam Lane rolled over on the floor, and Frank James was occupied in unlocking his handcuffs, one of the passengers, a St. Louis cattle buyer, named Larkin, made up his mind to act.

His pistol was out, and he was moving stealthily toward Frank James, designing to get near enough to his target to make the outlaw's death a certainty, when the sound of firing in his rear made him turn in nervous apprehension.

He saw the conductor struggling on the platform with two powerful Black Agents, and calling upon the other passengers—two old men and a slim young man, who was trembling like an aspen—to give him their assistance, rushed bravely toward the door.

He was within a few feet of it when it was slammed in his face and locked.

The conductor had already been knocked senseless.

A chorus of yells from without, followed by the crack of rifles and pistols, turned Larkin's attention to the windows.

Help had come, and the robbers had met with an unwelcome surprise.

Frank James, who was watching for a chance to assist his brother, found him just as the yells of his enemies reached his ears.

Sam Lane's head bobbed up from between two of the seats, where the combatants had rolled, and Frank James made it the recipient of a blow from the butt of his revolver, which had the effect of causing the detective to immediately lose all consciousness of earthly things.

As Jesse James, flushed, panting, and bleeding from several wounds, arose unsteadily to his feet, the train began to move.

"What does this mean?" hoarsely ejaculated the outlaw chief.

"It means that we're all right," shouted the voice of Clell Miller, from the door; "that is, if the boys at the rear are able to stand the mob off that is trying to double-bank us."

Crash! went the glass of the window in front of which Frank James was standing, and a rifle bullet whizzed past his head.

The three bandits made a rush for the last car, where the most of the firing was then going on.

Larkin, the cattle buyer, had resumed his seat, as a matter of prudence.

Finding the rear door of the car locked, and no one on the platform, Jesse James snatched a lid from the stove in the corner and sent it crashing through the window.

The train was now beginning to move rapidly, but the yells and shots appeared to multiply instead of to diminish.

Jesse James enlarged the hole in the window, and crawled through.

He was followed by his brother and Clell Miller.

They saw none of their enemies when they reached the platform, but when they threw open the door of the other car they beheld a sight that roused their combative energies to the highest pitch.

The three Black Agents detailed for operations at the rear of the train had been either overcome or killed, for not one of them could be seen.

But in the aisle were half a dozen mountaineers, who had just boarded the train, and were advancing toward the other door.

The conflict that followed was one of the most desperate that Frank and Jesse James had ever engaged in.

Frank had seized the Kansas officer's revolver when he started from the other car, and he stood by the side of Jesse when the battle opened.

The outlaws had the advantage at the beginning, for before the mountaineers could get their rifles to their shoulders, the rain of lead from the pistols had done deadly work.

Three of the mountaineers fell, but the others bravely stood their ground.

A rifle ball laid Clell Miller low, but not before a fourth mountaineer had toppled over, a corpse.

It was man to man now, and with the old Quantrell yell, the James boys sprang upon their enemies, firing shot after shot as they did so.

The barrel of a rifle came down on Frank James' head as he was about to send the man he had picked out for combat to his long home.

He was sinking to the floor, in a dazed condition, and the barrel was about to descend for the second time, when Jesse James, who had finished the other mountaineer, lifted his foot and gave the last of his enemies a kick in the stomach, which made him drop his weapon and double up in direst agony.

The outlaw chief gave him a dose of the medicine he had furnished Frank James before he could straighten himself up, but the blow given with the rifle barrel was such a vindictive one that it crushed the skull.

One look at Frank, who was just recovering, and Jesse James hurried to the rear platform.

Upon it were the dead bodies of two of the missing Black Agents.

The other was probably dead up the track, or in the hands of the mountaineers.

The train was now going at a rapid rate of speed, but in the distance the outlaw chief could see a small body of mounted men.

Shaking his fist in their direction, he muttered, grimly: "You thought you'd get away with us, but you got beautifully left, my gallant bucks."

When he returned to the car, the train was beginning to slow up.

It was still in the cañon of the Sierra Blanca, a few miles from Hot Springs.

Jesse James met one of the Black Agents, who had accompanied Big John to the engine, just as he was assisting Frank to his feet.

"We've got the whole business," he said, with a whoop of triumph. "All the passengers have been tied up and made to pungle; we've got their guns besides; Sam Lane is tied hard and fast, and the bullion is at the express door, ready to be lifted out."

The outlaw chief turned to Frank with a satisfied smile.

"Old boy," said he, "we have done it. I said this would be a ten-strike, and it is."

CHAPTER XIII.

SAM LANE'S RESCUE.

The mountaineers who had attacked the Black Agents had been organized by Lora Alleyn.

With Mark Fenton as her companion, she had ridden all night, and at daybreak had reached a mountain hamlet, where she was fortunate enough to find a score of hunters who were just about to start on an expedition for game into Bear Basin, some fifteen miles westward.

But when she stated her errand, every man of the party agreed to accompany her to the railroad, and attempt to checkmate the design of the robbers, which she had managed to get hold of.

About five miles from Los Huecos, they came upon the camp of the Black Agents.

The smoldering fire, where the breakfast had been cooked, together with other evidence, went to show that it had long been deserted.

Following the trail made by the robbers, they reached the railroad and the beleaguered train ten minutes after the attack of Jesse James and his men had commenced.

The rifles were quickly brought to bear upon such of the Black Agents as could be sighted.

Big John, who was alone on the engine at the time, his two associates having gone to give their attention to the other train hands, fired a couple of shots, and then, as he saw the mountaineers pressing forward to board the last car, he grasped the throttle of the engine, threw it open, and sent the train flying from the spot.

The three Black Agents on the last car, not understanding what the movement of the train meant, were hastening to the front platform when they were met by a half-a-dozen mountaineers, who, being nearer than any of their companions to the train when it started up, had slipped from their saddles quickly, and boarded it.

The Black Agents were fired upon before they could use their own revolvers.

Every one received a bullet, but none fell until, in their retreat, they stepped upon the rear platform of the car.

Here they became the targets of the mounted men, who were galloping down the track.

Two fell dead in their tracks; the other, with a leaden ball in his lung, leaped to the ground and was killed.

When the train was stopped, a few miles beyond the scene of the hold-up, some quick work was done by Jesse James and his associates.

The bullion was divided and placed in half-a-dozen sacks provided for the purpose, and carried into the bushes.

Then the captive detective was lifted out, and placed beside the treasure.

"How about poor Liz, Jim Cummings, and Clell Miller?" asked Frank James, when the operation above referred to had been concluded.

"We won't have time to bury them; our horses are miles away, and we've got to make tracks from here pretty lively. You might get Clell and Jim's watches, money, and weapons, though."

"All right."

Frank James went into the car where Miller had been shot, and was surprised to find the latter at the washstand in the corner, removing the blood from his face.

"Not dead, Clell?" Frank James sang out.

"Dead be blowed. I'm a little shaky, but the bullet to finish me hasn't yet been made, old boy. I was stunned, that's all."

Jesse James was overjoyed when he found that Miller had not been killed.

"Now if Jim's case will only pan out as well," he said, "we will be in fine shape."

But Cummings was found lying in a pool of his own blood, and unconscious.

Some of the Black Agents were in favor of leaving him behind.

Jesse James said "No."

"We'll pack him into the brush a piece," he went on, "and then fix up his hurt and leave him for a while."

This settled the matter. Five minutes after the removal of the bullion, Big John mounted the engine and started up the train again.

As the wheels began to revolve, he leaped to the ground.

"She'll go past Miles Grove a whizzing," he said, "and the chumps who are after us won't know that we stopped here until we are miles away, and where they can't find us."

Lora Alleyn and the remnant of the band of mountaineers did not strike the bandits' trail until late in the afternoon, the information which put them upon the right track having come from Hot Springs.

The train had stopped there, one of the passengers having got loose from his bonds and climbed over the side into the cab, and released the engineer, about twenty minutes after Big John started the engine.

The robbers carried the bullion for a short distance, and then buried it back of a bowlder in a spot difficult of access.

That night they were fifteen miles from the railroad, in a rocky glen where the feet of man had seldom trodden.

It was determined that Sam Lane should die next morning.

At midnight, while all the bandits were asleep, except Frank James, who was keeping watch, the moonlight disclosed the form of a woman, who was slowly descending the rough trail that led to the glen.

Frank James saw her, and was about to shoot, when she held up her hands in a supplicating manner.

As she approached nearer, he saw with amazement that she was Lora Alleyn.

Believing that she was in advance of a body of pursuers, Frank James hurried forward, and, pointing his pistol at her head, commanded her in a fierce whisper to halt.

"You need not fear me," she said, calmly, "for I got separated from my companions hours ago, and I have come upon your camp by accident."

"Accident, indeed!" was the sneering answer. "Why, you never could have got within miles of this spot, unless you knew where it was."

"Perhaps Jim Cummings aided me somewhat," she said. "I found him, early this evening, unconscious and delirious, and from his mutterings I gathered that you and your followers were in this direction."

"Jim isn't dead, then?" he asked, with a sudden change of manner.

"No; and I don't think he will die from his wound. I bathed it, and discovered a section of broken bone which was pressing on the brain. I removed it, and his ravings instantly ceased. Then I bandaged the wound anew, and left him resting very comfortably."

Frank James took her hand, and pressed it warmly.

"If you've saved his life," he said, earnestly, "you can ask any favor of us, with the certainty that it will be granted."

"I want you to release Sam Lane; that is, if he is alive and your prisoner."

Frank James' brow grew dark at once.

"I don't know about that," he said, slowly. "But," he added, after a moment's thought, "I'll stand in if Jess will."

Lora Alleyn's face brightened instantly.

"Call your brother, and let me present the case."

Jesse James was awakened, and at first was not inclined to listen to the cattle queen's supplication.

But he finally agreed to consider her case favorably, if her statement in regard to Cummings should prove to be true.

A detachment was sent out for the wounded outlaw, and he was brought to camp shortly after daybreak.

He was conscious, and Jesse James, looking at him critically, became convinced that he would live.

"I'll leave the matter to you, Jim," he said. "If you say Sam Lane ought to go free, why free he goes."

The wounded outlaw looked up into the pale, anxious face of Lora Alleyn, and murmured:

"Turn him loose."

* * * * *

Sam Lane and his courageous sweetheart reached Los Huecos at noon next day.

On the way they met Miss Alleyn's mountaineers, commanded by Mark Fenton, and a sheriff's posse, led by Dick Waldo.

"I would like to go back with you," said the detective, "but I am withheld by a promise not to take the field against Jesse James and his men for six months."

The outlaw hunters went on, but they failed to find their quarry.

THE END.

Next week's issue (No. 5) will contain "Jesse James' Oath; or, Tracked to Death."

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